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OBERON,

A POEM.

FROM THE GERMAN OF WIELAND.

By WILLIAM SOTHEBY, Esq.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

THE SECOND EDITION.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY W. BULMER AND CO.

CLEVELAND-ROW, ST. JAMES'S;

FOR T. CADELL AND W. DAVIES, STRAND.

1805.

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Dedication to the First Edition.

TO

SIR H. C. ENGLEFIELD, BART.

DEAR SIR HARRY,

IF the following version of a Poem, deservedly held in the highest estimation in its native country, can give any delight to your cultivated mind, it will add to that which I feel in dedicating it to you, as a trifling testimony of my esteem and friendship.

Yours, affectionately,

WILLIAM SOTHEBY.

Seymour Place, May Fair.
May 12th, 1798.

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OBERON.

CANTO I.

I.

YET once again, ye Muses! once again
Saddle the Hyppogryf! and wing my way
Where regions of romance their charms display.
What lovely dreams entrance th' unfetter'd brain?
Who round my brow the wreath enchanted braids?
Who from my ravish'd eye dispels the shades
That veil the wonders of the world of old?
Now conquering, conquer'd now, in battle bold,
I see the knight's good sword, the Pagans' sparkling blades.

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II.

In vain the hoary sultan foams: in vain
A wood of threat'ning lances bristles round.
It breathes, the ivory horn with sprightly sound,
And, whirl'd in eddying dance, the giddy train
Spin, till their breath and senses die away.
Triumph! the Fair is won: why, knight, delay?
Forward to Rome: for thee th' extended sail
And beck'ning streamer fly before the gale.
Haste! that the holy sire may bless your bridal day!

III.

Oh, may ye not the sweet forbidden fruit
Taste ere the time! beware the rash delight!
Fair blow consenting gales to speed your flight.
In two fleet days, at rest from vain pursuit,
Ye gain in peace Hesperia's golden ground.
If aught can save, while reeling joys confound,
Save them, true Sherasmin!—Ah! hapless souls!
They hear not threat'ning heaven, though thunder rolls.
Can Love so steep the sense in sudden trance profound?

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IV.

Love downward hurls them to the gulf of wo—
Who shall the fairy wood-god's rage control?
Lo! on the billows, arm in arm, they roll!
Yet happy in the hope, that, plung'd below,
Together sinking on each other's breast,
They both at once should die, in death how blest!
Vain dream! to vengeance Oberon resign'd,
Denies the last sad hope that sooths the mind;
Wo's last sad hope denies, to die, and be at rest.

V.

Ah! spar'd for keener pangs as yet unknown,
I see you wreck'd upon a stranger land,
Faint, and unfriended, roam the desert strand,
A cave your shelter, and its flinty stone,
Scarce hid with dry half-mould'ring reeds, your bed—
Thin on the leafless hedge wild berries spread,
Your only food—before your vacant eye
No cottage smokes from far, no vessel nigh—
Chance, fortune, nature, join to whelm your helpless head.

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VI.

Nor yet subsides th' avenger's boundless rage;
Nor yet has misery reach'd her highest aim:
Distress but nourishes their guilty flame;
They grieve, yet mutual tears their grief assuage—
But, to be torn asunder, as fell blasts
Drive far apart, while lightnings fire the masts,
Two ships, joint sufferers in the stormy way:
To be extinguish'd, while as yet a ray
Of hope, in secret nurs'd, a feeble twilight casts:

VII.

This yet remain'd—thou! once their guardian friend,
Ah! does the fault of love deserve to feel
Wounds without cure, and pangs no time can heal?
Alas! faint swims his eye, the tears descend.
Dread, wretches, dread your doom, when Oberon weeps.
But, whither, Muse! in charmed vision sweeps
Aloft the wildness of thy eagle flight?
The world of wonders rushing on thy sight,
In strange mysterious maze th' astonish'd audience steeps.

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VIII.

Come, on this couch recline; here sink at rest;
No more exclaim, "I see, I see, from high,
Wonders invisible to mortal eye!"—
But, with calm voice to mortal ear addrest,
Relate what happen'd—lo! th' impatient throng
Tiptoe with mute attention move along:
How willing, if thy tuneful art deceive,
To aid the charm, and self-delusions weave!—
Descend! and from its source draw forth th' eventful song.

IX.

The Paladin, whose bold advent'rous deeds
Must sure delight thee, (if, at least, thy mind
Aught of delight in deeds advent'rous find,)
Was bound to Babylon—the high emprise
That bad him forth, to knighthood's fearless eyes
Seem'd desperate in the days of Charlemagne;
But, in our times, nor glory, love, nor gain
Would youthful knight allure to seek such perilous prize.

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X.

" My son," Rome's holy sire, his uncle, said,
(Whose feet in tears our knight, good Christian, steeps,
And for his sins a flood of sorrow weeps,)
While with stretch'd hands on his repentant head,
The reverend father absolution gave—
" My son, depart in peace! all perils brave,
" Secure of conquest! Heaven thy courage bless,
" So thou from Joppa, pledge of high success,
" With pious pilgrim foot approach the holy grave."

XI.

The youth with humble lip his slipper prest,
Obedience vows, and parts without delay.
Hard feat had Charles ordain'd, and long the way:
Nathless the knight, his pious soul at rest,
On God and holy Christopher relies,
And deems all gain'd where glory points the prize.—
Arriv'd at Palestine, on holy land
He seeks the grave with pilgrim staff in hand;
There feels new courage spring, and faith redoubled rise.

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XII.

To Babylon he speeds with loosen'd rein,
And, " Comes it, comes it soon,"—yet still, I ween,
Rose many a hill, and wilderness between,
And many a pathless wood, and boundless plain.
Hard fate enough! lone, friendless exile, flung
On lands unconscious of his mother tongue?
That oft he check'd his course with vain delay,
And sought with wand'ring step his doubtful way,
Unknowing and unknown, wild heathen hordes among.

XIII.

It chanc'd, one morn, the pathway, dimly seen,
Wound thro' a wood—he speeds thro' storm and rain
To right and left the livelong day amain.
Forc'd ever and anon, wild glens between,
Where intertwisted bush and briar grew,
With slashing blade a toilsome way to hew.
Now on a steep ascent, from side to side,
He sees the circling forest,—far and wide,
As roams his boundless eye, expanding with the view.

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XIV.

The work of nature seem'd enchanted ground.
How fares he in the wilderness (by day
Where scarce the forester had found his way)
While, as he wander'd, darkness low'r'd around.
Now dire distress had reach'd its utmost height;
No star resplendent on the brow of night
Twinkles with friendly ray the shades among.
Huon alights, and drags his horse along,
Where, at each wilder'd step, thick boughs his fore-
head smite.

XV.

The starless gloom of raven-feather'd night
That wrapt the welkin round, the wood unknown,
And, for the first time heard, the thundering tone
Of lions, that the accustom'd ear affright:
Tones, from the midnight deathlike silence round,
Fearfully echoing, on each side rebound,
As on from rock to rock their horrours roll'd:
These might have mov'd the stoutest warriour bold,
And hearts unus'd to fear had shudder'd at the sound.

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XVI.

So fares our knight: tho' none from woman sprung
Had e'er beheld his cheek with terrour pale;
The hideous roarings that his ears assail
Shake his stout heart: with sinews loose, unstrung,
His arm and knee drop nerveless: 'gainst his will
Fear stands upon his brow in dew-drops chill:
But, pledg'd to go, no fears his vow withstand—
Onward, his falchion drawn, and horse in hand,
He finds at last a path along the rocky hill.

XVII.

Not long his step the winding way pursued,
When on his wistful gaze, so him beseems,
The light of distant fire delightful gleams.
His cheek flash'd crimson as the flame he view'd.
Half wild with hope and fear, he rush'd to find
In these lone woods some glimpse of human kind.
And ever and anon, at once the ray
Flash'd on his sight, then sunk at once away,
While rose and fell the path as hill and valley wind.

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XVIII.

Sudden the way that led deep rocks among
Sunk in a cavern, from whose pit profound
Sparkled a crackling flame: the stones around,
That o'er the night a wondrous radiance flung,
Were fring'd with bushes, whose rude tangles green
Dangled the mazes of the clefts between:
And as they glitter'd with reflected rays,
Shone like a verdant fire. In mute amaze
Motionless stood the knight amid th' enchanted scene.

XIX.

At once a voice, that thro' the cavern rung,
"Halt!" thunders forth; straight stands the knight before
One of wild mien, whose mantle, cover'd o'er
With cat-skins coarsely patch'd, loose flapping hung
Down to his hairy shanks: in tangled flow,
His coal-black beard thick wav'd his breast below.
A ponderous branch from giant cedar torn,
Swung, like a mace, upon his shoulder born,
Of pow'r the stoutest beast to level at a blow.

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OBERON, CANTO I.

Vol. I. Page 10

H.Fuseli R.A. Pinxit

I.Heath Sculpt

Published March 1st 1806. by Cadell & Davies, Strand.

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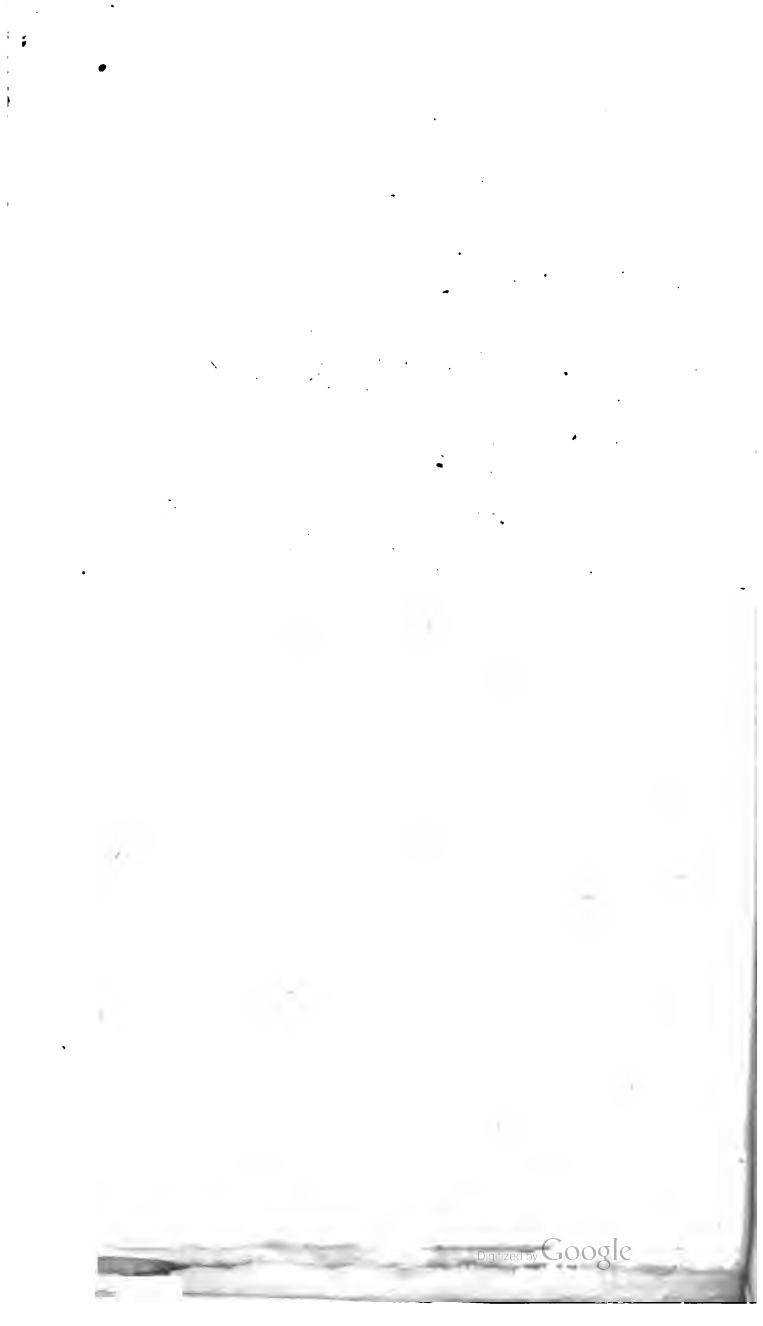
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XX.

The knight, undaunted at his savage dress,
Club, and rough beard, and all that met his view,
In mother speech, no other speech he knew,
Begins the story of his sad distress.
" What hear I ?" as his voice the woodman hears,
While down his hairy cheek stream joyful tears;
" Oh, mother tongue! oh, sweet melodious sound!
" Full sixteen years the sun has journey'd round,
" Nor has thy note, till now, e'er charm'd my longing ears.

XXI.

" Welcome to Libanon, illustrious knight!
" Though well I ween, no voluntary guest
" You came, night-wanderer, to my dragon nest.
" In peace repose thee, nor my welcome slight;
" And freely take whate'er I have, the cheer
" That Nature for her children caters here;
" Yet grateful to the taste when hunger wrings;
" And quaff my wine that in this cellar springs,
" Pure draught that thins the blood, and makes the eyesight clear."

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XXII.

Charm'd by this greeting, where the savage trod,
Our hero follows gaily to the spot,
Lays by his helm and hauberk in the grot,
And stands unarm'd, in form a youthful god.
The woodman, bound in fascinating trance,
Thrills, as his eyes upon the stranger glance:
While, as he lifts the helmet from his head,
Down his slim shape his hair diffusely spread,
Floats like a stream of gold, and curls in wavy dance.

XXIII.

" How like! how like! Yes, limb for limb the same;
" Breast, eye, mouth, hair,"—' Like whom?' Sir Huon says:
" Pardon, young man! a dream of happier days
" So sweet, yet, ah! so bitter, o'er me came.
" Ah! no! delightful dream! thou art not true;
" One moment seen, then vanish'd from the view—
" Yet, down your back when fell that golden hair,
" From head to foot himself, himself was there:
" His breast alone more broad, your locks of yellower hue.

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XXIV.

" Your's is my native speech: ah, not in vain,
" Haply, in you my dearest lord I trace;
" Whom now for sixteen years, in this wild place
" Far, far from every friend, I lonely plain.
" Ah! to survive him was the bitterest blow:
" Alone one sweet reflection sooths my wo:
" I clos'd his eyes; I laid him on the bier;
" I shed on his fresh grave the farewell tear.
" To see him here in you surpasses mortal show."

XXV.

'Chance,' Huon says, 'such sports so seeming strange
' Not rarely plays.'—" At least," exclaims his host,
" Chance, here, in what I feel, no part can boast.
" The love I bear you, sir, I dare engage,
" Is truth, plain truth, and no illusion vain.
" Good youth! to Sherasmin one favour deign!
" Forgive! oh, let me call you by your name!"
' Huon, the son and heir of peer of fame,
' Duke Segewin the Brave, once lord of fair Guyenne.'

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XXVI.

Fallen at his feet, he cries, with new delight,
" My heart deceiv'd me not—a thousand times
" Welcome, 'mid houseless rocks and barbarous climes,
" Son of the best, the bravest, worthiest knight;
" With whom, companion of life's better day,
" In many a pastime wild, and desperate fray,
" I dar'd th' adventures youth alone achieves.
" You leap'd a little child, in hanging sleeves,
" When to the Holy Land we took our votive way.

XXVII.

" Who ever could have thought that once again,
" We, after eighteen years, 'mid deserts hoar,
" Should meet on Libanon's unfriendly shore?
" Despair not, man of misery and pain!
" Though hope's last glimmer sunk in darkness dies,
" Again her star to light thy path shall rise.
" Forgive! that, wild with joy, my tongue too bold,
" Babbles at will; but, oh! 'bove all unfold
" What storm has blown you here, to bless my longing eyes?"

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XXVIII.

Now by the old man's side Sir Huon lies
Upon a bank of moss, before the flame;
And, as he feels, ere long, his wayworn frame
Cheer'd by the warmth, and gayer spirits rise
At every draught, pure welling from the cave,
And honey that the mountain wild-bee gave,
He 'gins with wish'd-for tale his host repay:
Who, more and more, with looks that never stray,
Seems to review his lord new-risen from the grave.

XXIX.

The knight, as youth's ingenuous lips relate,
Somewhat at large unfolds, how rear'd at court,
(For child of princely lineage fit resort,)
His lady-mother, as became his state,
Had train'd him to all deeds that knight beseem:
How swift had vanish'd childhood's lovely dream:
And on his cheek when stole the tender down,
How with proud pomp at Bourdeaux' festal town,
He rightful duke was crown'd, and hail'd with high esteem.

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XXX.

And how with pleasure's unabated flow,
Chase, tourney, banquet, ever sport and play,
Two years had glided like a summer day:
Till Amory, inexorable foe
Of all his race, with tale of base defame
Had blacken'd at the court his spotless name.
And how, with seeming grace, but poison'd mind,
Charles, to his sire before him ill inclin'd,
Had summon'd him to court, his feudal rights to claim.

XXXI.

Then he related, how his former foe,
The lord of Hoenblat, in evil train
With Scharlot, second son of Charlemagne,
The basest prince that e'er work'd parent wo,
(Who long had lusted for Sir Huon's land,)
Had secretly, with artful malice, plann'd
To slay him on his journey, unprepar'd;
And how, one morning early, as he far'd
By Montlery's deep wood, in ambush lurk'd their band.

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XXXII.

Young Gerhardine, my brother, (he pursu'd,)
Was with us, with his falcon on his fist,
Securely journeying; and when no one wist,
The boy, unwittingly, in joyous mood,
Strays from our pathway, gives his falcon flight,
And follows where he wings the airy height:
The while we steadily our course pursue;
Nor, as we went, one anxious moment knew,
What time the boy and bird were vanish'd from our sight.

XXXIII.

Sudden, a dreadful shriek of one in pain
Rings in our ears; directed by the sound,
We run, and find extended on the ground
Poor Gerhardine, defac'd with bloody stain.
O'er him a noble page is seen to stand,
Unknown, as it appear'd, of all our band;
Yet it was Scharlot's self, in that disguise,
In act to pierce the boy before our eyes:
Beside him stands a dwarf, his falcon on his hand.

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XXXIV.

With wrath incens'd, "Back, ruffian! back!" I said,
" How has this beardless boy, an unarm'd child,
" How injur'd thee, barbarian! blood-defil'd?
" Lift but a finger up against his head,
" This sword shall in thy heart be deeply died—"
' Ha! is it thou?' the other fiercely cried—
' I sought thee long; now, long-deferr'd, my rage
' Shall, instant, in thy blood its thirst assuage;
' Thou, like this boy, shalt fall beneath my footstep dead.

XXXV.

' Know'st thou me not?—in me behold the son
' Of Dietrich, Ardenne's duke, from whom thy sire,
' (Aye may he burn for this in quenchless fire,)
' Knight, little worth! by craft and cunning won,
' At open tourney, the contested meed:
' He fled, or I had slain him for the deed:
' The vengeance that he scap'd by coward flight,
' Shall on thy head with tenfold fury light:
' Thy father's crimes are thine, and thou for him shalt bleed.'

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XXXVI.

He spoke; and at the word, with deadly aim
Against me, unprepar'd for such mischance,
Suddenly levell'd his impetuous lance.
I, haply, as my adversary came,
Round my left arm my mantle loosely flung,
Parry'd the blow, and swiftly, as he swung,
Struck with my sword's rough hilt so dread a wound,
As instant dash'd him breathless on the ground.
Swift through his foamy lips the spouting lifeblood sprung.

XXXVII.

He fell, no more from earth to rise again!
And, to and fro, the woodland shades between,
Horsemen, a numerous troop, at times were seen;
Base cowards! to avenge their leader slain
None forward dar'd advance, but hover'd round
At distance, while we clos'd my brother's wound,
And slowly vanish'd from their sight away.
Then on a steed the ghastly corse they lay,
On to the imperial tower in solemn vengeance bound.

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XXXVIII.

Reckless that worse and worse, in desperate plight,
Far'd my repute at court, I gaily go,
Nor from the past adventure augur wo.
We come, and there, with wisdom highly dight,
My uncle, abbot of St. Denys, makes
Our greeting fair—no look suspicion wakes—
And all bespeaks delight and welcome cheer:
When to the banquet as the guests draw near,
Rous'd by the funeral pomp the tower's proud portal
shakes.

XXXIX.

Veil'd in black crape, twelve pages bear the pall
Up the high castle steps: in dread amaze
All on the spectacle in silence gaze.
Onward the sad procession seeks the hall.
The doors spring wide, twelve spectre shapes appear,
Stain'd with fresh blood th' unsightly coffin rear,
And 'mid the startled guests the body bear.
The king turns pale, fear points their bristling hair;
On me Heaven's fiery bolt seem'd flashing from the bier.

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XL.

Now Amory steps forth, the bloody fold
Lifts from the corse—"There, Cæsar! there," he cries,
" Sad sight, alas! to greet a father's eyes!
" Behold thy son! and here the fiend behold,
" Foe of thy peace, and traitour to the state.
" Ah, wo is me! poor prince! I came too late;
" Thy Scharlot, in the dark sequester'd dell
" Fell unawares, by stab of murder fell!
" Nor found in open field from knight a knightly fate!"

XLI.

What tho' base Scharlot o'er and o'er had stain'd
His father's fame, and griev'd him day by day,
Such thoughts at that dread hour no pangs allay.
Still, still his son, his flesh and blood remain'd.
Long motionless he stood—" My son, my son!"
Then loudly shrieks; and, all with wo o'erdone,
Casts his gray head upon the bloody bier.
Methought 'twas death the father-shriek to hear;
That time, for Scharlot's life, I glad had life foregone.

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XLII.

" Hear me, hear me, Sire," I cried, " my will is pure,
" Void of offence—the prince conceal'd his race;
" As Ardenne's son he met me face to face:
" The deeds he dar'd no mortal could endure:
" By heav'n! no saint, thus urg'd, could rage restrain.
" He struck the innocent boy: with sland'rous stain
" Hurl'd bold defiance on my father's fame.
" On me unwares, in murd'rous mood he came—
" Are there?—no; none can live, and such disgrace
sustain."

XLIII.

" Ha!" at the word the monarch fierce exclaims,
While from the corse he springs with lion rage,
Snatches a sword from an attendant page,
And sudden at my breast the weapon aims.
Had not the court restrain'd his lifted hand,
I there had died—At once the knightly band
Bristles in arms—at once with lightning ray
Bright gleams of clashing weapons wildly play,
And all intent on death, in threat'ning posture stand.

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XLIV.

With outcries wild the vaulted hall resounds,
The antique windows clatter, rocks the floor;
" Murder!" from every mouth, and " Treason!" roar.
Babel, again, the wilder'd speech confounds.
They foam, they run, they shake the threat'ning blade:
Alone the abbot to his sovereign's aid,
Shelter'd from outrage by his holy dress,
All fearless, rushing where the warriours press,
Stays with his breast our swords, by reverend awe delay'd—

XLV.

" Honour," he cries, " in me the heavenly Sire,
" Whose son I am—in name of Him above,
" Him, whom I serve, the God of peace and love,
" I bid ye peace!"—His air and tone inspire
Awe that had made wild heathen hordes obey.
Sudden the storms of rage their uproar lay:
Calm gentleness subdues each fiery mien;
Respectful silence smooths the lip serene;
Each warriour sheathes the sword, and anger dies away.

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XLVI.

Then to the king the abbot calmly told
How all befel—divine persuasion crown'd
His holy lip, but, ah! no favour found.
The father's eyes his son alone behold—
" See," he exclaims, " there bleeding, in his shroud,
" My Scharlot's mangled corse—pronounce, aloud,
" Princes! pronounce for me the murderer's fate.
" Yes; in his blood, my soul! thy vengeance sate—
" Die, murderer! feast the kites that round thy carcass crowd."

XLVII.

Then swell'd my heart—" Not here a murderer stands—
" Judges, their proper cause but ill award—
" This plot is Amory's, vile wretch abhorr'd!
" Th' accuser is the traitour—sire! these hands
" I lift to heaven, at hazard of my head
" Shall in his blood, by righteous vengeance shed,
" Prove him by test of arms, in mortal strife,
" A liar, and a traitour, life for life;
" Such will he aye remain, till howling mid the dead.

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XLVIII.

" I, like that lord, of princely lineage sprung,
" Peer of the realm, my birthright here demand;
" Nor can the emperour my claim withstand.
" There lies my glove, in bold defiance flung,
" Touch it, and dare the battle-test abide:
" Then shall th' impartial Judge of heaven decide
" Whom of us twain this murder calls to hell.
" No earthly fear my courage can repel,
" Truth is my shield of proof, and innocence my guide."

XLIX.

Th' assembled princes, as the monarch raves,
Each in my doom his own sad sentence hears;
Again the murmur that assails our ears
Swells like the stormy roar of rushing waves.
They pray, they urge, they state the law—in vain—
Bent o'er the bloody brow of Scharlot slain,
Mute agony weighs down the father's eyes;
E'en Hohenblat in vain his suit applies:
Proud man! he deems me dead, and smiles in high disdain.

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L.

" Sire, let this arm his insolence chastise,"
The count exclaims—" where right and duty call,
" No fears the soul of Hohenblat appal."
' Ha!' at the word my glowing spirit cries,
' Mock'st thou? not always, wretch! the lightnings sleep.'
" Yes, on thy brow," he says, " my sword shall heap
" Their vengeful flames."—My words, that truth inspires,
Light in the monarch's heart impetuous fires—
" Hence, guards! the murderer seize, and bound in durance, keep."

LI.

Rash word! again th' indignant hall around
The lightning weapons of the warriours glance;
Guardians of injur'd knighthood all advance;
The tumult maddens, blades to blades resound.
" Seize him!" again the impetuous king exclaims,
But views (while boundless rage to frenzy flames)
Their swords enring me round in friendly rows.
Half-crush'd, amid the press the abbot goes,
Threatens with dreadful ban, and God th'avenger names.

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LII.

The king and kingdom on a thread depend—
The aged counsel, on their knees, again
The fiery king implore: they kneel in vain—
In vain proud knighthood's injur'd rights defend:
The more they pray, the monarch raves the more;
Till that at last duke Naym (oft wont of yore
To guide his sov'reign's wrath-bewilder'd brain)
Whispers the king, then tells the knightly train
The battle-proof was fix'd, and all resistance o'er.

LIII.

Huon continues his unbroken tale—
At once the uproar, at this single word,
Was silenc'd—no rash voice a plaint preferr'd:
The knights retire, and peace and rule prevail:
Tells—that the emperor, though in heart enrag'd,
The storm half-low'ring on his brow assuag'd,
And for the battle fix'd the solemn day:
How that each knight array'd him for the fray,
Where his presumptuous foe had triumph sure presag'd.

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LIV.

Arrogant man! though ceaseless in his breast
Thunder'd th' accusing fiend in dread alarm,
He dar'd confide him in his iron arm,
That still victorious, where the battle prest,
Had shiver'd many a wood of bristly spears—
The man had never felt a sense of fears.
Hazard of life and death, th' advent'rous fight
Seem'd sport and pleasure to his giant might—
Vain confidence! when guilt an arm of iron rears.

LV.

Now the decisive day of battle rose;
Th' assembled people round the barriers throng;
Deck'd in resplendent mail I haste along.
Bright on my breast my shield of silver glows;
A general murmur greets me on my way:
Th' accuser stands impatient of delay—
In proud pavilion that o'erlook'd the ground,
Charles, with his court and barons girt around,
Smil'd favour on my foe, and mark'd me for his prey.

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LVI.

Now flam'd in cloudless heav'n the mid-day sun:
The judges sit; my rival, wild with rage,
Foams, till the signal trumpet bids engage:
The signal trumpet calls—at once we run—
Steed darts on steed—their clashing fronts rebound;
At once they pant extended on the ground,
And I and Hohenblat from peril freed,
Spring from our saddles, quit th' unruly steed,
And forward, sword in hand, rush fearless of the wound.

LVII.

No long and labour'd picture of our fight
Expect—in fury, force, and martial deeds
My proud antagonist his foe exceeds—
But mine, superiour to all earthly might,
Mine, innocence—with her my arm to aid,
Strong as my will, my prowess rose display'd.
Long o'er our swords suspended victory hung,
Tho' fresh from many a stream his lifeblood sprung;
While Huon fought untir'd, nor felt the hostile blade.

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LVIII.

The frantick wretch, while many a stream of blood
Smokes from his wounds, and paints his coat of mail,
Raves like the storm, that, thundering down the vale,
Wastes all beneath it with resistless flood.
Blow after blow, and peal on peal alight;
And Huon, prest by his superiour might,
With slow and circling steps awhile recedes:
But, as his foe in vain exertion bleeds,
Wards with reposeless arm, unwearied with the fight.

LIX.

The other, as he views him pale retire,
Grasps, with both hands, his sword, to crush the foe,
And end at once the battle at a blow—
But the vain stroke of ill-directed ire
Fails of its aim—and as defenceless rage
In guise unmeet the combat to engage
Reels off its guard, kind Heaven young Huon guides,
And near the corslet, where the helm divides,
He strikes—the boaster falls—no more the war to wage.

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LX.

Faint at his adversary's feet he falls;
Huon stands o'er him with uplifted steel—
" Unload thy conscience, wretch! thy crime reveal,
" Confess, ere God thy soul to judgment calls;
" Let truth, if life thou prize, thy cause defend."
Ah! at that dreadful hour, when near its end
The vital spirit flutter'd in its frame,
His force collecting in one desperate aim,
" Murderer! take this," he cries, " with me to hell
descend!"

LXI.

The desperate stroke, by rage uncertain made,
Aim'd from beneath, as Huon turn'd aside,
Chanc'd with slant blow along his arm to glide.
Ungovernable wrath the youth betray'd—
The knight, regardless that the truth alone
Could from the lip of Hohenblat be known,
That he alone could every rumour clear,
Breath'd by suspicion on the publick ear,
Drives down his throat his sword, and drinks his
dying groan.

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LXII.

The unrepentant wretch, in streams of gore,
Gives up the ghost—absolv'd his conqueror stands,
Wash'd in the traitour's blood that stains his hands.
Guiltless he stands the publick eye before;
The heralds loud his innocence declare,
And universal transport rends the air.
The knights the while his wounds unsightly close,
And stanch the blood that down his armour flows;
Then to the emperour's throne the youth in triumph bear.

LXIII.

Yet Charles, (for thus the knight's continued tale
The aged dweller of the cavern charms,)
Charles yet his rancour holds—the test of arms
Sooths not the father's wo—" Can aught avail,
" Can a new murder," stern he cries, " restore
" The life of him, alas! who is no more?—
" Did Hohenblat his innocence proclaim?
" No—let him, reft of honour, wealth, and fame,
" Now forfeit to the crown, be banish'd evermore."

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LXIV.

Severe the sentence, and severe the tongue
That spoke the word; yet all our toil was vain
To sooth the wretched father's frantick brain.
Knights, barons, princes, at his footstool flung,
Kneel, and with humble pray'rs the throne surround.
Their humble pray'rs no gracious answer found.
But when despair the murmuring warriours seiz'd,
Charles broke his sullen silence, half appeas'd—
" Princes! ye will; I yield: the knight has pardon
found.

LXV.

" Yet hear the terms; hear what no earthly power
" Shall ever change!"—He spoke, and wav'd below
His sceptre, bent in anger o'er my brow—
" Yes, thou mayst live—but, instant, from this hour
" Away: in exile rove far nations o'er:
" Thy foot accurs'd shall tread this soil no more,
" Till thou, in due obedience to my will,
" Shalt, point by point, the word I speak fulfil;
" Thou diest, if, this unwrought, thou touch thy native
shore.

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LXVI.

" Go hence to Bagdad: in high festal day,
" At his round table when the caliph, plac'd
" In stately pomp with splendid emirs grac'd,
" Enjoys the banquet, rang'd in proud array,
" Slay him who lies the monarch's left beside.
" Dash from his headless trunk the purple tide:
" Then to the right draw near, with courtly grace
" The beauteous heiress of his throne embrace;
" And thrice with publick kiss salute her as thy bride.

LXVII.

" And while the caliph, at the monstrous scene,
" Such as before ne'er shock'd a caliph's eyes,
" Stares at thy confidence in mute surprise,
" Then, as the Easterns wont, with lowly mien
" Fall on the earth before his golden throne,
" And gain (a trifle, proof of love alone)
" That it may please him, gift of friend to friend,
" Four of his grinders at my bidding send,
" And of his beard a lock with silver hair o'ergrown.

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LXVIII.

" Away, and ere with free and full success,
" According to my pleasure, plainly heard,
" Thou hast fulfill'd my order, word for word,
" Thou diest at thy return—expect no less—
" As for the rest, accept our royal grace."—
He spoke; amazement chain'd us to the place:
Avails it not our feelings to relate:
Such royal grace, we knew, was deadly hate;
We felt like men condemn'd, death star'd us in the face.

LXIX.

Mid the deep hall a sullen murmur rose—
" Ay, by St. George," cries one, (a sturdy blade,
Who at Sir Tristan's course had oft essay'd
His doughty arm, and fell'd a host of foes,)
" No light adventure shakes my soul with dread;
" I set, whoe'er defies me, head for head;
" But the strange feat that Cæsar has ordain'd,
" Sir Gawain's matchless arm had ne'er maintain'd:
" Sir Gawain's self had fail'd; brave knight! mid
perils bred."

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LXX.

Why speak I more? the terms his wish declare:
'Twas clear the emperour thirsted for my blood.
Yet Huon undismay'd before him stood.
Whate'er the cause, rage, haughtiness, despair,
Boldly, with frantick answer, I replied,
" Sire! by the terms I willingly abide—
" A Frank I am; impossible, or not,
" I dare th' adventure freely on the spot—
" Witness my word, ye knights! let weal or wo betide!

LXXI.

" And now, by virtue of this promise bound,
" Good Sherasmin! I go where honour calls,
" Come weal or wo, to Bagdad's hostile walls.
" Wilt thou direct me from this rocky ground
" Thither the nearest way, I thank thee, friend;
" If not, I go where'er the saints may send."
' Thou call'st me from the grave!' the woodman cried,
Down his gray beard as rush'd the joyous tide,
' Thou fill'st me with new life—I, I thy guide, attend.

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LXXII.

'Freely I swear, and here to pledge my word,
'My old, yet nervous arm I lift on high,
'With thee, whate'er befall, to live and die;
'Thee, son and heir of him, my honour'd lord.
'Danger awaits the work by Charles decreed,
'Yet glory crowns alone the dangerous deed—
'Go, mid the walls of Bagdad; by thy side
'There Sherasmin is found a faithful guide;
'For thee the latest drop that dies these veins shall bleed.'

LXXIII.

Touch'd by his zeal, and unexampled truth,
Young Huon falls upon his neck and weeps—
Then laid on straw they rest: our hero sleeps
As on a bed of down in happier youth.
The day awakes; and straight from sound repose,
Fresh as the morn, our warriour gaily rose;
Buckles his armour on: while seen to stand
With knapsack on his shoulder, club in hand,
Cheerily smiles his host, and forth tow'rds Bagdad goes.

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OBERON.

CANTO II.

I.

THUS go the noble pair—and blithe and gay,
Journey by sunshine, and the starry light,
Three days down Libanon's romantick height.
And when the fervour of meridian day
Strikes on their heads, they seek some shadowy lair
Where groves of ancient cedars cool the air;
While sweet around from silver throats are heard
Melodious songs of many a beauteous bird,
That pecks with wanton bill the traveller's scatter'd
fare.

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II.

'Twas the fourth morn, when near them on a hill
A little troop of horsemen they descried—
" These," (to Sir Huon says his trusty guide,)
" These are wild Arabs: and to speak my will,
" To turn a little from their course were best;
" I know the Arab for a scurvy guest."
' Ha! friend—what think'st thou then?' says Segewin's son,
' Was ever known a Frank his foe to shun?
' Right onward lies our path, tho' hostile hordes infest.'

III.

Magnetically drawn by Huon's helm,
That, by the sunshine gilt, all radiance gleam'd,
And like a ruby or carbuncle beam'd,
The roamers of the solitary realm,
With sword in hand, with arrow, and with bow,
Fierce as a tempest seek the vale below.
One horseman, one on foot, before their sight,
Already seem their prey, too few to fight—
Vain men! they little thought how dread each puissant foe!

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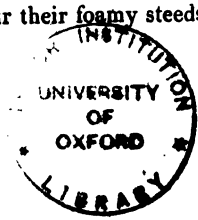
IV.

The Paladin, protected by his shield,
Dashes among them, and with lightning-speed
Strikes their bold chieftain from his fiery steed:
Breathless he falls—his blood o'erflows the field.
Rous'd to wild vengeance for their leader slain,
Against his conqueror rush the embodied train,
And fiercely hack and thrust with sword and spear;
But Sherasmin, keen guardian, watches near—
Prone at his club's first swing a boaster bites the plain.

V.

And mid the bowmen our unwearied knight
Such havock makes, so swiftly wings the wound,
A second and a third soon strew the ground.
At each new blow that thins th' unequal fight,
Here rolls a head, an arm there freshly bleeds,
Grasping the sword—nor less decisive deeds
Ensue, where Sherasmin his cedar plies—
To Mahom loud each cursing heathen cries;
Aghast the cowards fly, and spur their foamy steeds.



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VI.

With bloody wreck, and many a sever'd limb
Of man and horse, that o'er each other swarm'd,
The field of death was horribly deform'd:
And when our squire, equipt in gallant trim,
With palfrey and with sword, the spoils of fight,
Comes forth, Sir Huon speeds his eagle flight;
And mid the mazy vales confus'dly strays,
That at the mountain's foot in various ways
Stretch'd winding to and fro before his wilder'd sight.

VII.

It was a fertile and well-cultur'd glade,
Gay with the maze of many a silver rill,
That danc'd in sparkling currents down the hill;
Whiten'd with flocks, and meads in bloom array'd;
And many a hut, beneath the palmy wood
Of the brown dwellers of the valley stood.
Poor swains! that gaily work! in want how blest!
And, when in noontide shade they, weary, rest,
Beckon the pilgrim lorn to share their pastoral food.

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VIII.

Here with the mid-day heat our knight opprest,
Begs from some shepherd-wife her simple fare;
With sidelong glance the peasants scarcely dare
Peep at the stranger-man in iron drest;
But soon his lovely mien and friendly tone
Gain all their hearts, and gradual bolder grown,
The smiling children with his ringlets play,
While the brave man, himself as blithe as they,
Disports once more a child, by childish pleasure won.

IX.

How blest! he thinks, mid these lone huts to dwell!
Vain wish! him far away his fortune turns.
The evening gleams—his soul at parting yearns
To bid the haunts of happiness farewell—
Yet he must go, however loth, at last:
So to his host his purse Sir Huon cast;
But the blest race nor gold nor silver knew;
No hope of recompense their kindness drew—
The knight takes back his pelf, and, sighing, onward past.

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x.

Now, on they journey till the daylight dies,
And slowly sinks to evening glimmer gray;
Before their course a gloomy forest lay—
" Friend," to his faithful guide Sir Huon cries,
" I burn, the deed undone, I burn like fire:
" The nearest way to Bagdad I require—
" And such thy promise—years, methinks, are lost
" Since here I wander from my haven tost."
' Sir, thro' that wood it leads, but back, in haste retire!

xi.

' Tempt not that dangerous path—Sir knight, 'tis said
' That none who enter e'er return again!
' You smile, and deem, I see, my caution vain;
' Yet, trust me, sir, beneath that haunted shade
' A tiny wicked goblin holds his court;
' There foxes, harts, and deer alone resort,
' Men, once as good as we—in form the same—
' Heaven knows in what wild skin our human frame
' Shall be e'er dawn array'd, to make the demon sport!'

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XII.

" Leads but amid that wood," says Segewin's son,
" Right on to Babylon the nearest way,
" Nor ghost nor goblin shall my step delay!"—
' Hear me, nor thus forewarn'd on danger run—
' Sir! on my knees I pray! no coward calls—
' Your danger, more than mine, my soul appals—
' Against this demon force nor flight prevail—
' Pass some few days—'tis done—you Bagdad hail—
' And, ha! whene'er you come, too soon you reach
those walls.'

XIII.

" Since thus thy fears alarm thee," says the knight,
" Remain; I enter—fix'd as fate my will."—
' Not that—though death, indeed, is bitter ill!
' Better to die, than with disloyal flight
' Desert one's lord—that fellow base I hold!—
' Lead on; I follow, free and uncontroll'd.
' Heaven and the Holy Virgin be our guides!'
" Come," Huon says, and pale as death he rides;
The while unwonted awe unmans his follower bold.

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XIV.

Now as o'er all the veil of twilight hung,
While slow they wind the haunted shades between,
A herd of harts and hinds at once are seen,
That in full course before their pathway sprung.
Their ceaseless groans, like warnings, strike the ear,
And their large eyes o'erflow with many a tear.
(So Sherasmin beneath th' uncertain light
Will fain remark) and, sure, that piteous sight
Seems to proclaim, "Oh, fly! haste, haste! your fate
draws near!"

XV.

"Now, do you mark?" he whispers to the youth,
"Never again my caution turn to joke;
"You see it, word for word, the thing I spoke—
"These beasts you now behold, for certain truth,
"These beasts, that snort in pity of our wo,
"Are men, I say—and if you further go,
"Trust me, the goblin lights upon our head!
"Oh, do not, then, by obstinacy led,
"In spite of good advice, provoke that potent foe!"

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XVI.

'How, friend!' our hero cries—'my fix'd design
'Spurs me to Bagdad, from the caliph there
'To beg four grinders, and a lock of hair
'Pluck'd from his beard; and will'st thou, friend of mine,
'That I should palter from uncertain fear?
'Thy wits are lost to counsel such career;
'Who knows, perchance the goblin is my friend;
'And, sure, these beasts no mighty ill intend—
'See! how they all are fled, when once we venture near!'

XVII.

He says; and springs at once among the herd:
They vanish in a wink, like yielding air.
Onward Sir Huon and his leader fare,
In silence undisturb'd, nor whisper word.
The day was sunk: and night, advancing, throws
From nodding poppies dews of soft repose;
In sweet forgetfulness all stilly slept;
Along the wood no nightly murmur crept,
All noiseless as the dead whom churchyard graves enclose.

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XVIII.

The squire no longer can refrain—" Sir knight,
" If chance I draw you from some vision gay,
" Forgive me! but my weakness must have way—
" No—I deny it not—at dead of night
" It ever was my mood, from childish year,
" To prattle: all is hush'd in silence here,
" As if great Pan were dead. The iron sound
" Of our good steeds rings echoing from the ground,
" Or as he blindly works the mole would strike the ear.

XIX.

" You think I fright myself—not so I ween—
" Yet, without boasting, sir, (for, after all,
" Whate'er we have, mere gifts of heav'n I call,
" And many live who oft the deed have seen,)
" Set man to man, clash sword, and clatter shield,
" And hack and thrust, in tourney and in field:
" Let two or three 'gainst five or six contend,
" I take my part, nor fear how all shall end;
" There man can trust his arm, and front his foe reveal'd.

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XX.

" Has my foe flesh and blood, I nothing dread:
" I am his man: but this I freely own,
" To go at midnight in a church alone,
" It lifts the hat a little from my head.
" Grant that my mien should chance to discompose
" The hag of night that cross my pathway goes,
" Ah! what avails sharp sword and iron arm
" Against the wicked goblin's whisper'd charm,
" While on my shoulders rains a storm of viewless blows?

XXI.

" Grant, too, as many an instance makes it clear,
" That from his body I his noddle hew;
" Now, while it bleeding rolls before my view,
" Perch'd on the stump two heads for one appear;
" And oft th' impatient body in full flight
" Pursues the head, and ere it spins from sight,
" Pop, puts it on again, quite safe and sound,
" As if it were a hat just blown to ground;
" Ah! how can earthly man with such chimæra's fight?

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XXII.

" True, known to all, when cocks at dayspring crow,
" Then all the goblery, at noon of night
" Who creep in darkness, demon, elf, or spright,
" Soon as they hear his warning trumpet, go,
" As if a storm had blown them all away;
" But the strange spright that here delights to play
" His woodland pranks, unlike their race, methinks,
" But like mere mortal, lives, and eats, and drinks,
" And open court maintains, and walks at open day!"

XXIII.

' To screw my fancy to its utmost height,
' Friend, thou hast done thy best,' says Segewin's son;
' Of ghosts and goblins that the daylight shun
' They lie, and prate such wonders, wrong or right,
' That none, if laymen doubt, our doubts can blame.
' Once to our court a learned scholar came,
' Who swore 'twas all a mummery and deceit,
' That each ghost-seer was a fool or cheat;
' A manichæan vile our chaplain call'd the same.

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XXIV.

'Oft they disputed o'er a flask of wine,
'And when the last deep glass confus'd their brain,
'They mouth'd such Latin, in so learn'd a strain,
'That we were forc'd the converse to decline.
'Then, oft I thought, man, jabber as he will,
'How learn'd soe'er, yet plain experience still
'Must tutor him—he knows but what he knows—
'Ah! that some ghost would graciously disclose
'The strange mysterious scenes that man with wonder fill!'

XXV.

Meanwhile the wand'ring travellers onward go
Unwares within the circuit of a wood,
Whose mazy windings, at each step renew'd,
In many a serpent-fold, twin'd to and fro,
So that our pair to lose themselves were fain.
The moon full-orb'd now gain'd th' ethereal plain,
And as her beams through wavy branches play'd,
The twinkling fairy-dance of light and shade
Confus'd their wilder'd eyes that sought the path in vain.

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XXVI.

" Sir," Sherasmin observes, " amid the maze
" Of this deep labyrinth, perplexing art,
" To puzzle wanderers, well has play'd her part.
" The only chance to scape these crooked ways
" Is, by good luck, to follow—one's own nose."
This counsel (wiser than learn'd wights suppose)
Ere long conducts them to that middle space
Where all the walks that wind from place to place,
At once with circling rays a central star enclose.

XXVII.

And while they gaz'd around in mute despair,
Mid the wild woods a distant castle gleams
As woven from the evening's rosy beams.
It lifts itself, and glitters in the air.
In Huon's eye delight and terrour stole,
In doubt, if truth or fancy charm his soul.
Breathless he floats, as drawn by magick hand,
And sees the castle's golden gates expand,
And forth a silver car, drawn on by leopards, roll.

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XXVIII.

A boy more beauteous than the god of love
In smiling Cytherea's soft embrace,
Sat in the silver car with heav'nly grace,
And held the silken reins, and onward drove—
"Fly!" Sherasmin exclaims—"he comes!—we're dead!"
And seiz'd Sir Huon's steed, and swiftly fled.
"You're lost, for ever lost, if you delay!"—
'How fair he is!' cries Huon—"Fair! away!
"A thousand times more fair, a thousand times more dread!

XXIX.

"Oh, fly, sir! or your life's not worth a song!"—
Sir Huon strives, indeed, but strives in vain;
The old man speeds in fullest flight amain,
And after him drags Huon's horse along:
O'er stock and stone, thro' bush and brake they race,
Nor hedge nor ditch impedes their desperate pace:
Nor ceas'd the wight to scamper, fear-pursu'd,
Till, clear from out the compass of the wood,
They find themselves at last amid an open space.

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XXX.

A tempest, wing'd with lightning, storm, and rain,
O'ertakes our pair: around them midnight throws
Darkness that hides the world: it peals, cracks, blows,
As if the uprooted globe would split in twain:
The elements in wild confusion flung,
Each warr'd with each, as fierce from chaos sprung.
Yet heard from time to time amid the storm,
The gentle whisper of th' aërial form
Breath'd forth a lovely tone that died the gales among—

XXXI.

"Why dost thou fly? thy happiness thou fly'st!
"Come back, come, Huon! dare in me confide—
"Hear me! to happiness thy path I guide!"—
'If thou delay'st a moment, sir, thou dy'st!
'Away! away! your finger in your ear!
'He means no good—'tis death his voice to hear!'
Onward, through thick and thin, they dash again,
Beat by the blast, and flooded by the rain—
When lo! a cloister wall impedes their rash career.

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OBERON, CANTO II.

Vol. 1. Page 54.

H. Fuseli R.A. pinx.t *F. Engleheart Sculp.t*

Published March 1st 1806, by Cadell & Davies, Strand.

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XXXII.

A new adventure.—On that day befalls
The yearly feast in honour of the name
Of holy Agatha, most gracious dame,
The guardian of these girl-confining walls:
And there, not distant far, a convent stood
Of youths, St. Anthony's high-pamper'd brood.
That eve the cloister race their choirs had join'd,
And both a common pilgrimage design'd,
As nun and monk befits in social neighbourhood.

XXXIII.

Back they return'd, and near the cloister moat,
On as they wind, in order, pair by pair,
The rattling tempest thunders from the air;
Cross, standards, scapularies, wildly float,
Sport of the blasts; and through each folded veil
In torrents stream the rain and driving hail;
All ranks and orders in confusion lost,
Mingle in comick mood, diversely tost,
And scamper here and there, as wind and rain assail.

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XXXIV.

There, tuck'd up to the knee, a dainty nun
Wades through the brown morass: a brother here
Slips as he speeds, and thrown, sans grace or fear,
Amid the sisters that before him run,
Gripes, by her spindle shanks, some reverend dame.
Now, when the tempest lull'd, with languid frame,
Tir'd, out of breath, the mud-bespatter'd train,
Sous'd head and foot, assemble once again,
And to the cloister-court in crowds tumultuous came.

XXXV.

Here, as they pant together, monks and nuns,
Through the throng'd convent gate that open stood,
Mid the confusion of the cloister brood,
Pale Sherasmin with headlong fury runs:
That holy ground, like heaven he vainly deems,
And safe mid guardian saints himself esteems.
Soon Huon comes, and while with courtly grace
The knight permission begs, and checks his pace,
Swift as a meteor darts, the dwarf amid them gleams.

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XXXVI.

At once the storm is fled, serenely mild
Heav'n smiles around, bright rays the sky adorn,
While beauteous as an angel newly born
Beams in the roseate dayspring, glow'd the child.
A lily stalk his graceful limbs sustain'd,
Round his smooth neck an ivory horn was chain'd.
Yet lovely as he look'd, on all around
Strange horrour stole, for stern the fairy frown'd,
And o'er each sadden'd charm a sullen anger reign'd.

XXXVII.

He to his rosy lip the horn applies,
And breathes enchanting tones of fairy sound:
At once old Sherasmin in giddy round
Reels without stop—away the spinner flies,
Seizes a hoary nun without a tooth,
Who dies to dance, as if the blood of youth
Boil'd in her veins: the old man deftly springs,
Bounds like a buck, while every caper flings
Her veil and gown in air, that all laugh loud forsooth.

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XXXVIII.

Cloister and convent burn with equal rage,
Nor hoary hairs, nor rank the dance withstand:
Each sinner takes a sister by the hand,
And in the gay contention all engage.
Not soon such ballets shall be seen again:
No rules or discipline the choir restrain:
No tipsy fawn so bounds in wanton dance;
Huon unmov'd beholds the reeling trance,
While laughter shakes his breast to see the giddy train.

XXXIX.

The spright draws near: his tuneful accents low
Enchant the youth—he speaks with earnest mien—
"Why fly'st thou? why? O Huon of Guyenne?
"How! art thou mute? by heav'n, whose pow'r I know,
"Oh, answer me!"—Our hero, thus addrest,
Feels new-born courage on his soul imprest—
'Speak, thou! what wilt thou with me?' says the youth—
"Fear nothing—pure thy life—thy soul is truth:
"He who dares front the light is brother to my breast.

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XL.

" I lov'd thee from thy childhood, and the good
" I destine thee, free gift of special grace,
" I ne'er have shewn to child of Adam's race—
" Thy heart is pure, no baseness taints thy blood—
" Thy ways are straight: where honour, duty, call,
" Thou ask'st not flesh and blood—no fears appal—
" Thou in thyself confid'st when proofs assail:
" So that my favour, knight, can never fail:
" On spotted souls alone my vengeful torments fall.

XLI.

" Were not this cloister-people rightly blam'd,
" Mere hypocrites! If conscience, judge within,
" Accus'd them not each day of secret sin,
" Nor self-reproach their specious semblance blam'd,
" They, like thyself, when breath'd the fairy sound,
" Had heard unmov'd, nor frisk'd with answering bound.
" E'en Sherasmin, whose honest eye speaks truth,
" Merits some penance for his tongue, forsooth—
" They dance by force, not choice, and senseless whirl
around."

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XLII.

Another whirlwind, as he spoke, begins
More swift to agitate the giddy dance:
Light in the air so springs the ceaseless trance,
So fiercely foots it, and so quickly spins;
All melt, as snow beneath the thaw-wind flows;
High bounds the heart, the throbbing bosom glows.
Huon no longer can sustain the view—
Shame such young blood should melt away like dew!
He begs the beauteous dwarf to give the dance repose.

XLIII.

Then at his word the beauteous spirit waves
His lily wand: the charm dissolves in air;
St. Anthony's fat wards like statues stare:
And pale, as newly risen from their graves,
Haste the dishevell'd dames with decent grace
Their veils and robes in order to replace:
But to such capers Sherasmin unus'd
Feels with the ball his whirling brain confus'd,
And thinks his heart will burst, and sinks upon the place—

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XLIV.

"Ah!" pants he—"Gracious sir! I all foretold"—
'Friend Sherasmin!' the spirit cries, 'refrain—
'Hold! nor incur my chastisement again:
'I know thee for a hardy warriour bold;
'Yet will thy heart at times thy head outpace:
'Why dare, on others' word, the dwarf debase?
'Fie! gray in beard, in judgment still so young!
'Take calmly this reproof, and rein thy tongue—
'But ye, vile race! away! and mourn your just disgrace!'

XLV.

Away the cloister sinners slide asham'd:
The dwarf with kindness Sherasmin addrest—
"How! on thy brow still cloudy wrinkles rest?
"Still by that scowling eye the spirit blam'd?
"Yet I forgive: right simple is thy soul;
"Pure thoughts and honest deeds my rage control—
"Come nearer! nay, distrust not: fear no guile:
"Have heart in me; nor dare again revile;
"Drink, and recruit thy strength—here, drain th' o'erflowing bowl.

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XLVI.

" Here, press it to thy lips; be never cloy'd"—
He speaks, and proffers him a bowl of gold:
He, on his legs who scarce himself can hold,
Stares when he sees th' untasted goblet void—
" Still," cries the dwarf, " no trust! still pale of hue!
" Quick! to thy mouth! be to thyself but true,
" It will not fail"—the man at length obeys,
But with half-will, reluctant, still delays,
Till foams the Gascon wine that fires his thirsty view.

XLVII.

But when his breathless draught had drain'd the bowl,
He feels, like lightning with forgotten heat
The dancing life-blood in his arteries beat,
And spirits gay reanimate his soul:
Feels the fresh vigour of that youthful year
That led him with his lord in proud career,
Adventurers bold to Salem's holy walls:
Bow'd, at the fairy's foot he loudly calls,
" Now, like a mountain fixt, my faith despises fear!"

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XLVIII.

With steadfast look the dwarf to Huon turns—
" To me the order is already known,
" That sends thee forth to fall at Babylon.
" 'Tis for thy blood that Charles relentless burns:
" But thou shalt execute his dread command;
" Thy confidence his malice shall withstand:
" What thou hast well begun thou well shalt end:
" Here Oberon presents himself thy friend;
" Receive this ivory horn from no ungracious hand.

XLIX.

" Does but its snail-like spiral hollow sing
" A lovely note soft swell'd with gentle breath,
" Though thousand warriours threaten instant death,
" And with advancing weapons round enring;
" Then, as thou late hast seen, in restless dance
" All, all must spin, and every sword and lance
" Fall with the exhausted warriours to the ground.
" But if thou peal it with impatient sound,
" I at thy call appear, more swift than lightning glance.

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L.

" If, at that time, my path from thine recede
" Far as the world, if boundless space between,
" I at thy side am in a moment seen:
" Yet, oh! reserve that call for utmost need:
" And take this bowl, whose golden round contains
" Pure wine, self-springing from a thousand veins,
" If touch'd by guileless mouth; but if base lip
" Dare with rash taste the conscious nectar sip,
" 'Tis void, and burns the wretch with guilt-avenging pains!"

LI.

The knight with grateful hand each wonder takes,
Pledge of the favour of his fairy-friend:
And when he sees the rays of morn ascend,
And paint the purple clouds with golden flakes,
He asks the way to Bagdad's destin'd wall—
" Hence!" cries the dwarf, " where fame and honour call:
" And, oh! may never Oberon behold
" That dreadful hour, when Huon, good and bold,
" May yield to deeds of shame, that now his soul appal!

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LII.

" Not that thy heart and spirit I mistrust;
" But, ah! thou art a child of Adam's kind,
" Form'd of soft clay, and to the future blind!
" Woes without end oft spring from transient lust:
" My warning words thy happiness intend;
" Forget not, youth, the counsel of a friend."
Then with his lily wand he touch'd the knight,
And Huon views, O unexpected sight!
Roll'd from his azure eyes two liquid pearls descend.

LIII.

And as the grateful youth begins to swear
Eternal truth and duty to the spright,
Sudden the fairy vanishes from sight:
Yet still a lily fragrance fills the air,
Where the lov'd image charm'd his ravish'd eyes.
Mute gaz'd the knight, like one in sweet surprise,
Who seeks, when rous'd from fascinating dreams,
If true the vision that before him gleams,
Or all a nightly shape, that in a moment dies.

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LIV.

Yet, had he doubted more, the bowl of gold,
And ivory horn, that round his neck appear'd,
Hung by a golden chain, each doubt had clear'd:
But, above all, the goblet's magick mould,
To Sherasmin, once more to youth restor'd,
Seem'd choicest treasure of the fairy hoard.
In act to hold the stirrup of the knight,
"Yet, yet one draught, to thank the dwarf aright—
"'Tis nectar fit," he cries, "for Jove's celestial board!"

LV.

Now strengthen'd for their journey, forth they fare,
And over hill and dale, like heroes old,
Still wand'ring on by dangers uncontroll'd,
They pass whole days, and scarce at night repair
Where woodland shades the solitude enclose:
No strange adventures their design oppose—
The knight in spirit gains far Bagdad's tower,
And Sherasmin enjoys each passing hour,
While, by his side, in arms, the son of Segewin goes.

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OBERON.

CANTO III.

I.

As, the fifth day, by chance the wanderers stray'd
Where winding hills a narrow vale enclose,
Rich tents beneath them, stretch'd in stately rows,
Shone, in the pomp of Eastern pride array'd.
And on the turf, where thick the palmy grove
Impervious to the sun its shelter wove,
Lay knights in mid-day sleep all careless flung,
While waving on the boughs their lances hung,
And grazing o'er the mead their steeds at pleasure rove.

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II.

Scarce was the knightly brotherhood aware
Of echoing noises, and the sudden sight
Of horsemen pacing on the rocky height,
Than forth they start from their umbrageous lair:
At once, as they had seen a foe appear,
Or battle-trump had rous'd their startled ear,
The groves around in restless motion glow—
Now here, now there, all hurry to and fro,
The squires equip the steed, the warriours seize the spear!

III.

"Let us," Sir Huon says, "the cause unfold,
"Rous'd by what sudden object unforeseen,
"Yon revellers start, that slumber'd on the green!"
'Sir,' answers Sherasmin, 'ourselves, I hold;
'We are the cause—arm! arm yourself! prepare!
'On us yon crescent wheels—forewarn'd, beware!'—
Firm, with cool blood, Sir Huon draws his blade—
"Here is my pledge with this my arm to aid,
"Come on what will, my friend, the worst I freely dare!"

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IV.

Then from the troop, in polish'd armour bright,
Rides forth their gallant chief our pair to meet;
His words in courtly guise the strangers greet—
" Whoe'er of our high rank, illustrious knight!
" Mid these sequester'd haunts has chanc'd to stray,
" We ever have detain'd his errant way:
" And, sir, it rests with you, in bold career,
" If such your choice, to break with us a spear;
" If not, whate'er we will implicitly obey."—

V.

' What is thy will!' Sir Huon mild demands—
" Not far from hence fierce Angulaffer dwells,
" Whose hoarded wealth by daily plunder swells:
" High on a rock his iron castle stands;
" Sworn foe and tyrant of the Christian race,
" Keen as a satyr in the amorous chase;
" Nor sword nor spear can aught the giant harm,
" His magick ring defies man's feeble arm,
" Stol'n from the dwarf, whose wood you cross'd with
wilder'd pace!

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VI.

" A prince of Libanon now greets thee, youth!
" Who to the fairest of the fair was bound,
" For three whole years, nor grace nor pity found:
" So long unrecompens'd my peerless truth—
" She smil'd consent; and in the nuptial night,
" When love prepar'd to crown me with delight,
" E'en then, regardless of our mutual flame,
" In armour cas'd, that wolf! that monster! came,
" And seiz'd my lovely lamb, and tore her from my sight!

VII.

" And now six months have slowly roll'd away,
" Nor aught the labours of my life avail:
" E'en hope, sole balm of wo, begins to fail!
" The iron tow'r, that locks my fair from day,
" Denies alike my entrance and her flight:
" Alas! thus reft at once of all delight,
" One sole, sad joy remains; from yonder grove
" That fronts the castle which confines my love,
" To watch the distant tower whole days with aching sight.

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VIII.

" So clear, at times, her image seems display'd,
" Sure I have seen her with neglected charms,
" Her hair wild-waving, and uplifted arms,
" As if to pitying heav'n the victim pray'd.
" That sight has fixt a dagger in my breast!
" Since then, my soul by dire despair possest,
" Sets in the chance of war its sole resource:
" These warriours, sir, are conscious of my force;
" No knight goes hence unfought, who slights my just behest.

IX.

" But if success attend thy bold career,
" Success to mortal wight as yet unknown;
" If, by thy valour, from the saddle thrown
" I prostrate fall, no let or hindrance fear:
" But if my lance, more fortunate, succeed,
" You, like these knights, must dare th' advent'rous deed;
" Like these, in prompt obedience to my will,
" Must swear my sov'reign order to fulfil,
" And bring my lovely bride from Angulaffer freed!

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X.

" But if it please you to decline the fight,
" And swear at once to penetrate the tow'r,
" And force my angel from the giant's pow'r,
" Free choice is thine, and more—my thanks, brave knight!"—
Sir Huon says, ' What profits it to choose?
' Kind, gracious prince! your offer I refuse:
' Yet much I thank you for the honour done:
' I long with you and all your train to run.
' As for the rest,'tis time when low your liegeman sues.'

XI.

Th' astonish'd chief with changeful colour pale,
At Huon stares, but shame forbids delay:
The trumpets peal; and in the tourney-fray
The knight's strong spear so strikes his brilliant mail,
That on the bosom of his mother earth
He lays the prince, like warriour little worth!
Swift, with impartial lance, upon the plain
He levels with their leader all the train:
Then lifts them up with grace befitting courtly birth.

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XII.

" Sir, by my troth," the cedar prince exclaims,
Slow-limping tow'rds him with uneasy pace,
" I hail the stoutest knight of Christian race!
" Your hand, brave youth! and let less painful games
" Of festal brotherhood, and dainty cheer,
" Commend me to your favour, brave compeer!"
Sir Huon thankfully accepts the treat:
With mirth and banquetting their guest they greet,
And in his smiles forget the prowess of his spear.

XIII.

" Now," says Sir Huon, " since this arm has pow'r
" To win what sure was mine, at will to stray,
" Know, then, dear friends, that I without delay
" Speed on, unbidden, to the iron tower.
" To this I was resolv'd long time before,
" And now, more fix'd, to please my host the more."
Then lowly bowing to the festive train,
That stranger knights so nobly entertain;
Salutes them one by one, and thanks them o'er and o'er.

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XIV.

And when the knights the nearest way had shewn,
That through a fir-wood to the castle leads,
In fearless confidence Sir Huon speeds,
That, haply, rescu'd by his arm alone,
They soon shall hail the beauteous bride again—
"Adieu!"—'Heav'n guard you!'—In full course, amain
The bold adventurer through the forest flies;
And when Aurora paints the purple skies,
Beholds the gloomy tower that shades the wide champaign.

XV.

Th' enormous fabrick, form'd of iron ore,
Close barr'd around, all avenue denied,
Save where a little gate, scarce two feet wide,
Stood open, and the little gate before,
Metallic monsters of colossal height,
Through sorcery alive, so swiftly smite
The ground, rebellowing to their iron flail,
That stroke and stroke between, more thick than hail,
No beam of day can pass with undivided light.

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XVI.

And now as in suspense the warriour stands,
In doubt to act, and droops with musing mien,
Bent o'er the tower a beauteous maid is seen,
Bows to the knight, and waves her beck'ning hands.
" Ay, ay," cries Sherasmin, " those waving arms
" May beat the wind; but trust not, sir, their charms!
" Those wardens there my very soul congeal!
" Look at yon Switzers with their flails of steel!
" No bone can pass uncrush'd!—Such death the brave
alarms."

XVII.

Yet bound by knighthood, Huon firm remain'd
Not to recede, though death his course oppose!
Yet since no counsel can these dangers close,
Since all must be by force, not prudence, gain'd,
Forward he dashes through the iron flails,
Sword rais'd, eyes clos'd—Such confidence prevails!
Heaven deigns to second his heroick trust:
Each fierce colossus, at his foremost thrust
Stands motionless as death, nor other foe assails.

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XVIII.

Scarce is the hero enter'd, (while the squire
Holds in the outward court his fiery steed,)
Than the fair bride, all wonder at the deed,
Flies with wild joy; gay hopes new charms inspire:
Loose down her neck her ebon tresses flow,
Loose floats upon the ground her robe of snow,
And clasp'd her lightly-shaded breast beneath,
A zone confin'd her shape with golden wreath:
Shape, that nor Grace or Muse might half so lovely show!

XIX.

"What saint," (exclaims the sweetly blushing maid,)
"Guardian of faith, and innocence, and truth,"
The while her trembling hand scarce touch'd the youth,
"Sent you, brave hero! to a stranger's aid?
"Yes; when you first approach'd the gloomy tow'r,
"I to the Virgin at that hapless hour
"Stretch'd forth my suppliant hand: she heard my pray'r,
"And by your valour snatch'd me from despair.
"Welcome, brave warriour! sent by Heaven's all gracious power.

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XX.

" Oh, haste! heroick knight! no more delay.
" How hateful to my soul each moment creeps,
" While yet this loathsome tow'r its captive keeps!"—
' Fair maid! I came not thus to speed away—
' Where is the giant Angulaffer fled?'
" He lies in peaceful slumber, seeming dead:
" Ah! should he rouse, how vain thy arm, brave knight!
" Vain earthly force to conquer him in fight,
" Long as the magick ring protects his charmed head.

XXI.

" Yet shall thy hand the ring securely take;
" The time now serves"—' How so?'—" The wondrous sleep
" Oft wont, each day, in death his sense to steep,
" None from his eyelid, ere the time, can shake:
" Here we may pass, unhurt, two livelong hours,
" Ere life returning reassume its pow'rs:
" Hear, while my words in brief the whole recite:
" My father, Balazin of Phrygia hight,
" O'er Jericho bears sway, and rules her sacred towers.

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XXII.

" Four years are past since fair Alexis lov'd
" These hapless charms: a prince of all the race
" Of Libanon most fam'd for peerless grace.
" Though coy disdain his patience sorely prov'd,
" Yet did my heart his virtues highly hold:
" And oft in secret wept my vow too bold,
" Sworn when the youth first woo'd me for his bride,
" That the connubial knot should ne'er be tied
" Till three chaste years of proof had slow and sadly roll'd.

XXIII.

" Love, gradual, o'er my heart in secret stole,
" And, ah! the time of proof too slowly past!
" It came—the long-expected hour at last!—
" Then, while my lips no more conceal'd my soul,
" The chamber door in thunders open'd wide,
" In rush'd the giant! tore me from the side
" Of lov'd Alexis, weak, alas! to save—
" Would we had sunk together in the grave!
" Seven dreary months these walls have held his captive bride!

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XXIV.

" Who but heav'n's queen has deign'd a virgin aid?
" She heard me, lovely virgin! full of grace!
" The monster falls all senseless on the place:
" Falls, while he vainly woos a spotless maid.
" He seems as one in death, all vigour fails:
" For six whole hours the lethargy prevails.
" As oft his hateful passion he renews,
" As oft the miracle his force subdues;
" The ring no virtue boasts whene'er that sleep assails.

XXV.

" This day again he woo'd, again he fell!
" Four of the destin'd hours have sped their course:
" Soon will he glory with recover'd force,
" And daring strength his limbs resistless swell.
" Dangers nor threaten'd death the wretch alarm,
" The while his finger wears that elfine charm.
" Who without proof its various virtue knows?
" Haste! take the ring, while now his eyelids close;
" Oh, haste! ere rous'd from sleep, new vigour nerve
his arm!"

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XXVI.

Now, reader, fancy-rais'd, as swells thy mind,
Rous'd by the sound of Angulaffer's name,
Thus far'd it with our knight—his thoughts on flame
Had form'd a giant of Titanian kind,
Brood of the earth, who erst, to storm the sky,
Heav'd, with uprooted woods that wav'd on high,
Mountain on mountain, and with effort bold
On groaning Ossa enormous Pelion roll'd—
But now, scarce seven feet growth, a mortal meets his eye.

XXVII.

Hast thou the godlike work of Glycon seen,
A breathing image of the chieftain bold,
Fam'd offspring of that wondrous brood of old?
Such figure to thyself in shape and mien,
The man who lately at the close of day
Dar'd with loath'd love the plighted maid essay.
The wisest modern, fam'd for taste refin'd,
Who then had view'd him as he slept reclin'd,
Had thought "There, pride of Greece," th' Herculean image lay!

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Published March 1st 1806, by Cadell & Davies, Strand.

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XXVIII.

A Hercules, by leaden sleep opprest,
When ceaseless labour through the livelong day
Had cleans'd at last th' Augean heap away;
Thus spread his back, thus rose his brawny chest;
The same in figure, and in garb the same;
Yet to our knight, this man of giant frame
Seem'd, in the day's chaste beam, not slightly mad,
Thus to repose, like Grecian hero clad:
Mere heathenism sure! devoid of grace and shame!

XXIX.

"Now haste," with cheeks on fire, the virgin cries,
"Now seize the ring, brave knight! and all is o'er;
"Strike but one blow, the monster is no more!"—
'Such deeds ill suit me,' Huon calm replies,
'Sleeps he without defence, my naked foe,
'Weak as a child, unarm'd to ward the blow;
'He sleeps secure for me—Wake, wretch, awake!'—
"At least th' enchanted ring, brave warriour, take."—
He takes, and rules the ghosts, unweeting rules I trow,

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XXX.

The ring, to many a virtue yet unknown,
This wonder adds, that by enchantment bound,
It fits each finger with its pliant round,
As shap'd by curious art for that alone.
Swift it contracts, again as swift expands,
And suits alike both elf and giant hands.
The knight with awful transport views the ring,
Then shakes the slumberer with unwearied swing,
Till rous'd he starts at last from sleep's enchanted bands.

XXXI.

Scarce does the giant heave his mighty frame
When Balazin's fair daughter, wild with fright,
Loud shrieking flies away: firm stands the knight,
True to his order, and unblemish'd fame:
The heathen rolls around his glaring eyes—
"Ha! who art thou, poor wight?" he fiercely cries:
"Why interrupt me in my morning sleep?
"Thy head must from thy body long to leap,
"That thus before my feet its offer'd tribute lies!"—

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XXXII.

'Up!' cries our hero,—'arm! thyself defend!
'Wretch! to such threats my sword alone replies:
'Up, boaster! from thy dreams to death arise!
'Heaven sent me here—thy life draws near its end!
'Clos'd with thy life, thy crimes, barbarian! cease.'—
Strange terrours shake his foe—"Release, release
"That ring, the while I slumber'd basely won;
"Then, ere too late, my rising anger shun,
"And thank thy lucky stars, and leave these walls in peace!"

XXXIII.

'What thou didst basely steal, that ring, I take,
'And to its owner will again restore,'—
Says Segewin's son:—'arm, arm! delay no more—
'Prepare thyself, nor further parley make!'—
"Youth! while I slept, without delay or dread
'Thou mightst, unhurt, have hurl'd me to the dead!
"It pities me thy youthful blood to spill!
"Retire! nor urge my wrath against my will!
"Brave man! restore the ring—be thine thy forfeit head!"

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XXXIV.

'Shame on thy coward heart!' the youth proceeds—
'Dost thou forgiveness beg? dost thou decline
'The combat, and, unmann'd, for mercy whine?
'Die! or deserve thy life by knightly deeds.'—
Up springs the foe, his limbs gigantick swell—
The castle shakes! his eyeballs glare like hell!—
His nostrils foam with rage, his mouth breathes fire!
He grasps with clattering hand his war attire,
And shakes his shield of proof, that braves all magick spell!

XXXV.

Down hastes the knight, and down without delay,
Cas'd in bright steel, his haughty foe appears:
Forgetful in his frenzy, while he rears
His magick armour, that its pow'rs decay
Beneath the dazzling ring's superiour charm.
At the first blow of Huon's vigorous arm,
The laugh forsakes him—in dark tides of death
Blood gushes up his throat, and bars his breath,
While more than mortal fears the staggering wretch alarm!

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XXXVI.

He falls, as prone from Taurus summit hoar
Falls some huge fir in thunders on the ground!
The castle with its turrets rocks around!
His stiffen'd eyeballs close—he breathes no more!—
And now the fiend of hell with grim delight
Drags to the cave of everlasting night
His spirit, doom'd to writhe in fiery pain!—
Sir Huon wipes his sword from poisonous stain,
Then hastens where the maid yet shakes with wild affright.

XXXVII.

" Hail! to thee, noble knight! thy powerful blade
" Has freed me:—now thy triumph is complete!"
Fair Angela exclaims, and at his feet
Transported falls—" and hail! thou heavenly maid!
" Who bad'st this knight thy votaress defend:
" Hear, while from grateful lips my vows ascend—
" Yes, the first son, that crowns my nuptial bed,
" How large soe'er, an offering for my head,
" This hand shall o'er thy shrine his weight in gold suspend!"

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XXXVIII.

Sir Huon hastes the kneeling fair to raise,
And, as high peer of princely birth became,
Greets with all courtesies the grateful dame:
Greets with the good old forms of knightly days;
Compar'd with ours, of texture less refin'd,
But better colour'd, and more thickly twin'd:
The vow of knighthood was to serve the fair;
Did but a woman sue, all perils dare,
And bleed alike for all, tho' chance to none inclin'd.

XXXIX.

The damsel, who no moment had enjoy'd
To muse at leisure on his shape and mien,
Now as he stood unarm'd before her seen,
Had more than all the thousand eyes employ'd
That star with light the peacock's radiant tail:
Yet, sure, she thought, a thousand eyes would fail
To count his charms, so far beyond compare;
His features, stature, form, and graceful air,
O'er all her wond'ring view had e'er beheld prevail!

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XL.

Yet she compar'd him not in beauty's pride
To him, the youth who won her virgin heart;
Free gaz'd her eye, that rov'd from part to part,
While not a wish allur'd the guiltless bride:
No fluttering pulse her innocence alarms;
No inward pang the sting of conscience arms.
Round her young breast a sweet illusion plays,
And, what secur'd the virgin, free to gaze,
Was, that no treacherous thought recall'd Alexis' charms.

XLI.

And, artless Angela! propitious fate
Will'd that thy looks, though form'd to wake desire,
Strike not in Huon's breast a spark of fire!
Let not this, "passing strange," a doubt create:
For when the youth's unconscious eye, by chance,
Met thine, and half-way mingled glance with glance,
Cold was his look, as of a bust of stone:
He on a vase of flow'rs the like had thrown,
Or on a group of nymphs that wrought in tap'stry dance.

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XLII.

It was, I know not what magnetick sway,
That, while it draws to Babylon the knight,
Dulls the keen radiance of his youthful sight,
And casts in shade her beauty's dazzling ray.
In vain her figure, like a beauteous vase
Shap'd by the hand of love, commands applause:
In vain, that, softly aquiline, her nose
From the smooth ivory of her forehead rose,
Vain each majestick grace, that willing wonder draws!

XLIII.

In vain her bosom, like twin hills of snow,
Around whose swell light vapours shadowy play,
Soft'ning with twilight-tint the glare away,
Gleam'd through the gauze that flutter'd to and fro;
In vain her skin was like the glassy stream,
Where charm'd Aurora views her rosy beam;
In vain had beauty on each part imprest
Her glowing seal so visibly confest,
That dress nor gilds her charms, nor veils their native gleam!

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XLIV.

Yet lovely Angela, with all her charms,
In Huon's breast no warm sensation moves:
In truth, her presence but a burthen proves:
At every look he wish'd her in the arms
Of lov'd Alexis, ne'er to part again.
Yet no such wish her grateful words contain.
At length the knight, beyond all patience wrought,
Interprets by his own her secret thought:
His zeal to serve the fair no longer can refrain.

XLV.

Scarce had he promis'd his all-pow'rful hand,
And scarce her lip had thanks eternal vow'd,
When, lo! with horse and horsemen echoing loud
The court rebellows! now the the steel-clad band
Shout, as they clatter through the iron door:
Now up the winding stairs confus'dly roar!
The damsel shrieks—yet soon her wild affright
Melts into joy—Oh! unexpected sight!
See! lov'd Alexis springs her sparkling eyes before!

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XLVI.

Too late, at last, the self-conviction came,
That, while the knight the ravisher defied,
And from the giant fore'd the beauteous bride,
The victor's triumph was the lover's shame!
'Twere shame that he, with all his gallant train,
He, her betroth'd, shou'd free from wound remain!
Sleep in cool shades, beneath the green-wood dine,
And thin his tender blood with palmy wine!
And ah! if base that knight, could aught his force restrain?

XLVII.

Then, instant as the blush of conscience died
The bridegroom's cheek, he summon'd all his train,
Sprung on his steed, and spurr'd him on amain,
Lest that our knight shou'd, ere he came, decide
The desperate fray, and leave for him alone
To take the beauty by another won;
Commend the stranger to the saints above,
And—shame himself, you think, before his love:
But, sirs, he was a pripce! a prince of—Libanon!

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XLVIII.

Beyond his utmost hopes Sir Huon freed
From tedious circuit to the palmy vale,
Suffers the prince, whose flatteries never fail,
To swell his praises that all bounds exceed.
Yet, like reproof he feels unbounded praise:
And now at once before their wond'ring gaze,
Rais'd by the ring, a sumptuous table stands,
Bedeck'd invisibly by fairy hands,
And all that lures the eye, or tempts the taste, displays!

XLIX.

"Ha!" cries the bride, "ere yet we join the feast,
"Haste to the harem, that detested spot!
"Wretch that I am! such scenes so soon forgot!
"Youth! with thy hand unloose, from death releast,
"Full fifty virgins lockt within the tow'r,
"A dainty tulip bed, of maids the flow'r!
"These, by the giant not in pity spar'd,
"Were, sure, for some high festival prepar'd:
"An offering for his god, stern Mahom's deadly pow'r!"

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L.

The harem opens, and at once unfolds
In sweet confusion wild the living scene
Of Mahomet's voluptuous heav'n, I ween!
Soon as our knight the tulip bed beholds,
He to the gallant youths commends the fair:
Speeds o'er the plain, nor aught regards their pray'r:
While as he turns in haste his steed away,
They beg the honour of his further stay,
His presence beg, at least, the festive board to share.

LI.

Now as the gradual gleam of rosy light,
Slow melting into evening-gray, subsides,
And soft the moon along th' horizon glides,
His courser droops, exhausted with the flight.
Sir Huon seeks beneath the shade repose;
And, while around his anxious eye he throws
In search of shelter, where each weary steed
The care of Sherasmin may freely feed,
At once before his sight a stately tent arose!

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LII.

Wide as the circuit of the tent extends,
A silken carpet spread upon the ground
Invites repose on pillows plac'd around,
Whose airy swell at every touch ascends,
And heaves itself, as if with life possest,
Internal breath inspir'd its wavy breast:
A golden tripod in the midst supports
A jasper table, where a banquet courts,
Deckt like a heav'nly feast, our pair by hunger prest.

LIII.

Long mute he stands, as frozen on the place;
Then asks the woodman "What these wonders mean?"
'Ah!' cries the other, sparkling at the scene,
'Friend Oberon is near! his special grace
'Beams o'er yon banquet visibly imprest:
'Without his aid, our limbs were fain to rest,
'Not sunk in eider-down, to snug repose,
'But on the earth, where chill the night-gale blows!—
'Ay, him I call a friend, who aids his friend distrest!

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LIV.

'Sir! after such fatigue repose is sweet:
'Let us, awhile, these bonds of steel unbind,
'And give to mirth and revelry our mind:
'Well has the beauteous dwarf prepar'd the treat:
'Although in haste, the fairy spares no pains,
'But his dear friends most nobly entertains.'—
The knight his counsel takes, and free from care
The jovial guests like ancient heroes fare,
And drain the frequent bowl, and crown with Gascon strains.

LV.

Insensibly the gentle hand of sleep
Unknits their slacken'd nerves, while sweet to hear
As warbled musick of the heavenly sphere,
Along the silent air soft voices sweep;
From every tree a sound melodious floats,
As if the leaves were chang'd to fairy throats:
And clear alike in all, the angel song
Of soul-enchanting Mara flow'd along,
And tun'd a thousand trills, and swell'd the liquid notes.

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LVI.

Now gradual low the melody declin'd,
Full as at first, but sinking in its close,
Down to the cadence soothing to repose
Of the weak whisper of the summer wind,
When scarce a blossom trembles on the spray,
And scarce a wave in undulating play
Curls the clear lake the Naiad's knee around!
Huon, half slumberous, hears the expiring sound,
Then gently lull'd to rest, his senses die away.

LVII.

He sleeps unmov'd till loud the early cock
Sounds to the world Aurora's fiery steed:
Wild wondrous dreams that restless fancy feed,
Now sweetly charm his soul, now strangely shock:
He seems through pathless solitudes to rove,
By rills o'erhung with many a shady grove:
Near him a woman like a goddess stands,
Beam'd from her eye heav'n's purest bliss expands,
And round her winning form soft wind the charms of love!

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LVIII.

Can words the feelings of his soul convey?
Ah! till that time unfelt the force of love;
Trasported, breathless, without power to move,
Alive but in his looks, that never stray,
He stands, all wonder, rooted on the ground:
And when no more the vision hovers round,
He thinks the shade still swims before his gaze;
And when no more the sweet illusion plays,
Closes his languid eye, and dies in trance profound!

LIX.

In conscious death, as rapt in charmed dream
He lay upon the bank, he feels a hand
Warm touch his icy heart, new pow'rs expand:
While wak'd to blissful life his glances beam
Upon the beauty radiant by his side,
He thinks a goddess deigns from heaven to glide
In all her charms confest to mortal view;
The forms of earth such graces never knew,
Thus lovelier glow'd the fair than when at first descried.

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LX.

Their mingling glances shoot from heart to heart:
Soul speaks to soul. How quick, how strong, how warm!
At once the daylight dies—Amid the storm
That veils the heavens, portentous lightnings dart;
Roll'd in his fiery chariot thunder raves,
Rous'd echo bellows from her mountain caves:
By more than mortal arm the goddess born,
Is in a whirlwind from his struggles torn,
And hurl'd before his sight amid the howling waves!

LXI.

He hears her shriek of anguish, strives to save,
And cannot—Oh! unutterable pain!
With horrour dead, he struggles, pants in vain—
Fixt like a statue pointing to the grave
He stands, and moves not—Now all vigour lost,
He freezes, wedg'd in masses ice-emboss'd;
Now sees her, praying, from the flood extend
Her sinking arm—and cannot, wretch! defend,
Nor die—how blest with her! mid whelming billows tost!

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LXII.

" Sir!" calls his squire, who sees him on the spot
High tost with restless agony, " awake!
" Bad dreams your labouring throat convulsive shake!"
' Away!' cries Huon, ' fiend! torment me not—
' Ah! wilt thou rob me of her fleeting shade?
' Leave me, at least, the visionary maid!'
Up wild he starts, keen anguish thrills his soul,
Fierce throbs his heart, his eyes confus'dly roll,
And ghastly pale his cheek, with drops of ice o'erlaid!

LXIII.

" That was a heavy dream," the old man cries;
" Too long, perchance, upon your back you lay."—
' A dream!' cries Segewin's son, ' perchance it may!'
While gentler sorrows in his bosom rise;
' Yet ah! it racks my soul with inward woes.'
" Heav'n in its grace may otherwise dispose!"
' Now tell me,' says the knight, with earnest air,
' Think'st thou not, friend, that dreams, at times, declare
' The will of heaven to man, and future scenes disclose?'

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LXIV.

" Such instances are known," returns the squire,
" And since I've follow'd your advent'rous way,
" Wonders are things of course, seen every day:
" Yet, as your words the truth, plain truth, require,
" Freely to speak, your dreams mere dreams I hold!
" Sir, in my slumbers flesh and blood make bold
" To play, as suits them, no inferiour part:
" So taught our sires in rhymes all know by heart:
" Rhymes once in high esteem in those good days of old.

LXV.

" Yet, haply, I may frame a better strain,
" If to my faithful heart you deign confide
" Some items of your dream, my thoughts to guide."
' Yes, I will, freely, all that pass'd explain;
' But time enough for this ere close of day:
' Yon height scarce reddens with the morning ray—
' Give, give me now the spirit-stirring bowl,
' Its magick beverage may refresh my soul,
' That droops with leaden thoughts, and seems to die away!'

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LXVI.

And while delightful draughts his strength repair,
The squire with earnest eye the youth pursues,
As one whose mournful gaze with pity views
Brave Segewin's son, the slave of deep despair:
Weak, as a woman weak, the man he deems—
Why? thinks he, why? and shakes his head, shall dreams
Now, in the day, when shines the sun, appal?
Why, in one's waking hours, such things recall?
Yet, since 'tis so, the bowl best solace he esteems.

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OBERON.

CANTO IV.

I.

THE youthful Paladin begins his dream—
" Friend Sherasmin, whate'er thy honest heart
" May chance to think of what my lips impart,
" Do not the words of truth invention deem;
" Such as thou see'st me here, thus chaste, besure,
" Yes, Heaven be prais'd! in mind and body pure,
" Has Huon liv'd a bachelor unblam'd:
" Love, till this time, my spirit ne'er inflam'd,
" Nor beauty snar'd my soul with sweet attractive
lure!

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II.

" That from my childhood I so oft had seen
" Full many a shoulder bare, and ivory breast,
" No doubt, the tumult of the soul supprest:
" Custom in this, like dread Medusa's mien,
" Turns us to stone, though fairest charms unfold:
" But what avail'd it me that, coy and cold,
" I liv'd till twenty years had o'er me past!
" It came, my friend! the fated hour at last!
" And in a dream, alas! the goddess I behold!

III.

" Yes, Sherasmin, these eyes at length beheld
" The goddess fixt by fate to sway my soul—
" Soon as I view'd, I felt love's sweet control,
" Nor has a wish in secret since rebell'd!
" And call'st thou this a dream? Can phantoms vain
" Thus leave their trace on the retentive brain?
" Say that my senses are for ever lost,
" Wild in a sea of willing frenzy tost!
" She lives—I clasp'd her charms—and will embrace
again!

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IV.

" Oh! hadst thou but my lovely angel seen,
" Such as I saw her; or were mine the art
" To paint her as she hovers round my heart;
" Old as thou art, all glowing at her mien,
" Thyself hadst burn'd like embers swift consum'd!
" Oh, were some relick mine, by love illum'd!
" Some relick that from her its life receiv'd!
" Then had my spirit less intensely griev'd—
" Oh! were it but the flower that in her bosom bloom'd!

V.

" Paint to thyself in fancy's colouring warm
" A vision woven by the hand of love,
" Trac'd from the bright originals above!
" Grant that proportion mould her angel form,
" That on her lip soft smiles celestial play,
" That youth each charm with winning grace array,
" That temper'd majesty the whole inspire,
" At once to waken and repress desire,
" Then fancy's golden tints her shadow scarce portray!

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VI.

" While softly lur'd by her enticing charms,
" I to my soul this lovely vision prest,
" Who seem'd in heaven's aërial colours drest,
" And felt her heart dissolve within my arms;
" How was it that my soul, when tranc'd I lay,
" Swoon'd not with bliss, and gradual died away?
" Come, coldly scorn this dream, by fancy bred;
" All my past life how flat, how void, how dead,
" Compar'd to dreams like these that heavenly bliss convey!

VII.

" Oh, Sherasmin! 'twas no delusive shade,
" The sport of fancy rais'd by fumes of wine!
" She lives, my conscious bosom speaks her mine!
" Says, that for me was born the lovely maid!
" Perchance the fairy deign'd the vision weave!
" Ah, friend! though vain, the sweet illusion leave!
" Talk not of fancy, her aërial shade
" Leaves not a trace, at once the visions fade!
" If fancy, truth is false, and can, like dreams, deceive!"

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VIII.

The old man shakes his head in caution mute,
As one who pondering with suspicious ear,
If e'er he chance a wondrous tale to hear,
Doubts, disbelieves, yet knows not to refute.
" What think'st thou, friend?" exclaims th' impatient knight,
' 'Tis that,' returns the unenamour'd wight,
' 'Tis that which puzzles me: I had, indeed,
' Doubts and objections strong, but why proceed?
' 'Twould serve no other end, but grieve thee, sir, outright!

IX.

' Now, since your princely word, howe'er obtain'd,
' In honour binds you to the emperour's will,
' Haste! speed we on, his order to fulfil!
' Glory, sir knight! at Bagdad may be gain'd—
' Who knows, the strange enchantment may subside!
' Who knows, good Oberon our path may guide,
' And the dream-princess may again appear!
' Meanwhile, if hope, good sir, your spirits cheer,
' Hope on—her dreams, at least, refresh the vital tide.'

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X.

While Sherasmin thus speaks, with downcast look
Bends the wan lover: ah! how chang'd the scene!
The wo that chills his heart o'erclouds his mien.
" Deceive me not with hope by fancy fed!
" Deceive me not with show of solace vain!
" Malignant stars my misery pre-ordain!
" What can I hope! the storm, the destin'd storm
" That tore from my embrace her angel form,
" Predicts my fate to come, and kills with prescient pain!

XI.

" See! she is snatch'd away, and from the wave
" In life's last struggle, lo! her arms extend!
" My heart-blood freezes as the floods ascend—
" Fixt on the ground, without the pow'r to save,
" I stand as one whom massy fetters bind!"—
' That was a dream, sir!' Sherasmin rejoin'd;
' Those darker bodings, shadows vain esteem—
' Sir, after all, a dream is but a dream:
' Trust me, select at will what most delights the mind.

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XII.

'That some kind spirit in a dream of night
'Should shadow forth the empress of your heart,
'So far 'tis well—there truth may bear a part:
'I credit that alone which gives delight:
'But for the rest, storm, whirlwind, wave, and screws
'On hand and foot, there dreams the sense abuse:
'Mere forgeries those, base coinage of the brain!
'Such in my youth I felt, illusions vain,
'When by the night-mare prest I stream'd with icy dews.

XIII.

'There, for example, I remember well,
'When forth I went to saunter free from care,
'Heaven knows from whence, a black and bristly bear
'Rush'd out before my pathway, grim as hell!
'I, mute with horrour, grasp my trusty blade,
'Pull, pull in vain!—my limbs no longer aid—
'Down drop my slacken'd joints—the monster there
'Grows as I gaze—jaws widen—eyeballs glare!—
'I cannot fight, nor fly, by viewless force delay'd!

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XIV.

'Another time, when, from your evening meal
'You dream that home returning, by the way
'Where an old mansion totters in decay,
'As fearfully along the gloom you steal,
'At once a little window shutter rings,
'And looking out a nose of giant springs
'Long as your arm! where'er you strive to fly,
'Before, behind, strange phantoms fix your eye,
'Loll out a length of tongue, and dart their fiery stings!

XV.

'Then while in deadly fright you breathless glide,
'And sideways press against the wall, behold
'A wrinkled hand with skinny finger cold,
'From a round hole at once is felt to slide
'Chill down your back, and fumbles you about
'From rib to rib, to pinch you well, no doubt:
'Up starts each bristling hair; to bar your flight
'The street still narrower grows before your sight,
'Colder the hand of ice, longer the giant snout!

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XVI.

'Such things as I have said, full oft appear,
'But at the last they prove mere fooleries vain,
'Spun by night spirits in the heated brain:
'The nose, and all the pangs of idle fear,
'Fade as you wake—Were I, sir, in your place,
'I should erase what grieves me from the case,
'And stick to what the spirit promis'd fair.
'Courage, sir knight! my bodings good declare!
'Go forth! the living maid in Babylon embrace!'

XVII.

Fresh springs, embolden'd at his word, the knight:
New spirits to his nerves new life impart:
No more the dream lies heavy at his heart.
His steed, in trappings gay, that greets his sight,
Neighs to the freshness of the morning wind;
Up Huon vaults, and as he looks behind,
The tent is vanish'd from his wond'ring eyes!
Now, in a moment, seems in air to rise,
Now all is blown away, a vision of the mind!

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XVIII.

Where high Euphrates winds its gentle tide,
Onward they took their solitary way,
Beneath o'ershadowing palms that dim the day.
Enchanting land! creation's fairest pride!
Slowly they went: still, pensive, neither spoke:
Each inly mus'd—no voice the silence broke.
The balmy breath of morn, her roseate gleam,
The birds gay melodies, the murmuring stream,
To visions of delight enchanted fancy woke!

XIX.

What can the youth in fancy's mirror view,
Save her, the maid that shines in all reveal'd?
He paints the goddess on his polish'd shield:—
Now dares with fearless speed her trace pursue,
Up Taurus' height; now penetrates the gloom
That shrouds the horrours of dread Merlin's tomb:
Goblins and dragons levels at a blow
That guard the castle, echoing to her wo:
Nor dreads to drag her forth from hell's unfathom'd
womb!

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XX.

While thus the knight, by many a danger won,
Clasps in his arms the visionary bride,
The old man from Euphrates' flowery side
Strays imperceptibly to sweet Garonne.
He sees once more those lovely plains expand,
Where the first flow'ret lur'd his infant hand:
No where, he thinks, the sun so mildly gleams
As on the banks where first he drank its beams:
So green no other mead, so smiles no other land!

XXI.

" Thou little spot! where first I suck'd the light,
" Thou witness of my earliest smile and tear!
" Lov'd haunt! though distant far, how fair appear
" Thy scenes in day-dreams floating on my sight!
" Where'er I wander, my returning mind
" Still feels itself to thee in secret join'd!
" Feels without thee e'en Paradise unblest—
" Oh! be the boding true that swells my breast!
" O lay me in thy lap amid my sires reclin'd!"

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XXII.

Tranc'd in such dreams the distance melts away—
Onward they hasten, till the mid-day heat
In shadowy groves compels them to retreat:
Beneath an aged tree their limbs they lay,
Where tufted moss its rich luxuriance weaves,
And to a velvet pillow softly heaves.
There as th' o'erflowing goblet thirst subdues,
And thrice with nectar draught their strength renews,
Sudden a thrilling shriek rings through th' embowering leaves!

XXIII.

Uprous'd they spring, his sword the warriour draws,
And finds, directed by the deadly sound,
A Saracen, whose steed from many a wound
Fast bleeds beneath a lion's rav'nous jaws:
Of force and courage reft, with hopeless air,
The shrieking Pagan fights from mere despair,
Fights with faint arm; while maddening more and more,
The mangled courser welters in his gore,
And fiercely grinds his bit, and staggers here and there.

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Vol. I. page 223.

H. Fuseli R.A. pinx.t

C. Warren sculp.

Published March 2nd 1805, by Cadell & Davies, Strand.

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XXIV.

As forward darts the beast with hideous roar,
And flashes lightning from his eyes of flame,
Huon divides his flank with sidelong aim:
The wound inflames the forest king the more;
Fiercely he bounds, and rends with headlong spring
The iron plates that round the warriour cling:
Blood from a thousand sources dies the plain:
That single stroke had torn the knight in twain,
Save for the magick force of Angulaffer's ring!

XXV.

Sir Huon summons his remaining strength,
And though death glar'd before him, undismay'd
Darts in the monster's neck his vengeful blade—
In vain, high rais'd, his tail's enormous length
Swings in the air, and curling to and fro
Had crush'd in instant death his prostrate foe,
If active Huon had not leap'd aside—
In vain his claws gigantick open wide;
Bold Sherasmin draws near, and fells him at a blow!

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XXVI.

The Pagan, round whose head the brilliant light,
That starr'd his jewell'd turban, richly flam'd,
And, at first sight, a man of note proclaim'd,
Yet shakes with fear, though rescu'd from the fight.
The knights support him, propt on either side,
To cooling shades his footsteps slowly guide,
Then lay him on the turf, the goblet reach:
And Sherasmin, well-skill'd in Eastern speech,
Cries, "Praise the Christian God, who sav'd, or thou
hadst died!"

XXVII.

With evil eye, from Huon's courteous hand,
Fill'd to the brim, the heathen takes the bowl—
Back from his lip th' indignant bubbles roll!
The spring is dried, and hot as fiery brand,
Proof of internal guilt, the metal glows:
Far from his grasp the wretch the goblet throws,
Raves, roars, and stamps, till wearied at the scene
The knight, with sacred sword and threat'ning mien,
On sudden to convert the base blasphemer goes.

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XXVIII.

By strength superiour aw'd, the crafty wight,
Who dar'd them not with open force withstand,
Like a chas'd ostrich skimming o'er the sand,
Swift, where their horses graze, directs his flight—
At once he lightly vaults on Huon's steed,
Close gripes the mane, and with unbridled speed
Spurs his fleet pace, and vanishes from sight,
As if upborn upon a storm of night,
Whose wings divide the clouds that from its course recede.

XXIX.

Th' adventure was vexatious—yet in vain
All hope the dastard miscreant to pursue—
By chance a mule-like thing appears in view:
A trifle buys him from the willing swain;
Though, scarce alive, the courser threat to fall
Oft, ere arriv'd at Bagdad's neighb'ring wall;
Though with each tott'ring step his strength decline,
Yet the bare ridges of his rocky chine
More please the panting squire than slow on foot to crawl.

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XXX.

Now to the wish'd-for port without delay,
Well as they could, their knightly course they bend,
And as the sun's slope wheels to earth descend,
Far in a vale that stretch'd before their way,
The gleams of evening to their gaze expose
Where, crown'd with many a tower that stately rose,
The queen of cities spreads her golden scene—
A Paradise expands, for ever green,
And here the Tigris winds, and there Euphrates flows.

XXXI.

How throbs his heart with mixt delight and awe,
Strange wild vicissitudes of hope and fear,
And secret bodings, as yon walls appear!
There more than earthly pow'rs his spirit draw:
There, more his courage and determined mind
Than Cæsar's bidding, had a deed enjoin'd
Whose end was death!—Though, ever fix'd the same,
Destruction brooded o'er his desperate aim,
Yet danger seem'd more dread, more near the spot
assign'd!

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XXXII.

He, mid refulgent minarets of gold,
Sees, radiant, like the city of a god,
Studded with palaces by emirs trod,
The throne which Asia trembles to behold—
"And thou, fond man! what sways thy mad career?"
He starts—but yields not to invading fear,
Fir'd by his vow and knightly promise given,
And whispering sounds which seem to breathe from heaven,
"Knight! to the destin'd bride thy course adventurous steer!"

XXXIII.

"Up, Sherasmin," he cries, "each sail expand;
"Behold the haven where our wandering ends:
"To Bagdad haste, ere night her shade extends!"
Onward they fly along the level land,
While horse and horseman pant from breathless speed:
The squire, in pity to his gasping steed,
Sprinkles his tongue with drops of fairy wine—
"There, drink, my friend," he cries, "for worth like thine
"The goblet never dries—drink, friend, and swift proceed."

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XXXIV.

Good Sherasmin judg'd well, for scarce his tongue
(That as a cinder dry hung forth to view)
Had from the goblet suck'd the nectar-dew,
Than, fill'd with life, the quick'ning juices sprung
Through all his bones, and boil'd within his veins.
With each fresh drop the beast fresh vigour gains:
With heart and lungs restor'd he flies away,
Swift as a grayhound springing on his prey—
'Tis done—the port is gain'd, ere night their course
detains.

XXXV.

And now, while yet they wander'd in the street
With wearied step, by twilight, to and fro,
Without a guide uncertain where to go,
They chance, amid their doubts, by luck to meet,
Propt on her crutch, a little aged crone
Who cross'd their path, slow tottering on alone,
With shrivell'd skin, pale cheek, and temples gray—
" Guide to some inn, good mother! guide our way,
" For here we rove in vain, unknowing and unknown!"

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XXXVI.

She leaning on her crutch, now rests her pace,
Screws up her head that nodded on her breast
To eye the strangers that her ear address—
"Good sir!" she says, "from hence full far the space—
"But, since you seem with long fatigue half spent,
"And, chance, a little may in need content,
"Sirs, welcome to my hut—there's milk and bread,
"Grass for your beasts, clean straw to strew your bed;
"There rest, and fresh at dawn go forth wherever bent."

XXXVII.

The knight accepts with many a thank sincere:
To him more grateful than the palace gate,
Smiles the low cot where peace and kindness wait,
And point the open door—Our Baucis here
Strews for their bed clean straw, and o'er them show'rs,
Fresh gather'd from her garden, orange flowers—
Rich milk, and juicy peaches form the treat,
And figs now blackening on their native seat;
Yet griev'd she that bleak winds had nipt her almond bowers.

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XXXVIII.

Sir Huon thinks that till that happy hour
He never had enjoy'd such pleasant fare:
Sure, if aught fail, his hostess' busy care
And chat so glibly free, have more than power
To make amends—" The gentlemen, I know,
" Come even to the feast"—' The feast! how so?'
" How! know you not? all echo, sir, the thing;
" From tongue to tongue no other tidings ring,
" Our sultan's daughter weds, to morrow weds, I trow."—

XXXIX.

' The sultan's daughter weds! whom? tell me whom?'
" The bridegroom is a prince of royal race,
" The sovereign of the Druses, high in grace,
" Comely and rich withal—let none presume,
" How skill'd so'er, to cope with him at chess;
" A prince, in short—a prince, whom all confess
" Born for our Rezia: yet, to speak the truth,
" That angel rather, sir, than wed the youth,
" Would with infolding arms a dragon fierce caress!"

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XL.

'That deem I wonderful!' the knight replies,
'Nor can I lightly credit the conceit,'—
"Again I say it, ere she deigns to meet
"That man, she clasps a dragon—some are wise—
"To me the why and wherefore well are known:
"And, sir, to speak the truth, I freely own
"In confidence, I had it from a third,
"And promis'd, doubtless, not to say a word—
"But—give me, sir, your hand, the secret is your own.

XLI.

"It wonders you, perchance, how things like these,
"Things from the princely race, and all conceal'd,
"Should slide within this cot, to me reveal'd!—
"One little word, and you the whole will seize.
"Such as you view me here, thus lone withal,
"Mother of Rezia's nurse myself I call:
"And much the princess holds her Fatma dear,
"Tho' since she nurs'd her 'tis the sixteenth year—
"You spy, sir, how I know what things at court befall.

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XLII.

" 'Tis known to all, that since, some time at least,
" Our sultan of his daughter fondly proud,
" Not seldom call'd her where the princely crowd
" Of gallants came parading to the feast:
" Proud lords, and beauteous youths, a brilliant show:
" And this alike, both town and country know,
" No happy one preferr'd above the rest,
" Was, when he woo'd, with smiles peculiar blest:
" With more than coy reserve she saw them come and go.

XLIII.

" Meanwhile 'twas hop'd the coy one would endure
" The man who chosen by her father came;
" Prince Babekan, for thus they call his name.
" Not that her heart, at any time, be sure,
" With higher palpitations ever beat
" Whene'er she chanc'd his excellence to meet—
" She shunn'd him not—no more the prince obtain'd—
" But (since she none preferr'd) their hands once chain'd,
" 'Twas thought, love soon would pair their hearts in union sweet.

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XLIV.

" Yet, since a few fleet weeks, his hopes are fled;
" Rezia detests his highness more and more:
" Poor prince! he scarce dares glide her eye before!
" Does he but whisper of the marriage bed,
" The roses die that bloom'd upon her cheek:
" And, though incredible, the truth I speak,
" Sir, of this change a dream has all the blame!"—
' A dream!' Sir Huon shouts with breath of flame—
" A dream!" the old man cries, " what strange and wondrous freak!"

XLV.

" She dreamt" (continued the loquacious dame)
" That Babekan, mid wilds, with restless chase
" Urg'd her, in form a hind, from place to place,
" And, as his bloodhounds gain'd upon their game
" Down a steep hill, and hope for ever fled,
" While death in horrours darken'd o'er her head,
" At once a beauteous dwarf appear'd in view,
" Whose golden car two youthful lions drew:
" Onward in full career the flying axle sped.

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XLVI.

" And Rezia, when the fairy near her came,
" Rear'd in his hand a lily wand descried:
" And one in knightly armour by his side,
" A strange young gentleman of graceful frame,
" Sweet, beauteous as a god!—his eye of blue,
" And long, long locks that beam'd of golden hue,
" Betray'd that Asia boasted not his birth:
" Yet sure, where'er that blissful spot on earth,
" At once his glance of love her charmed spirit drew.

XLVII.

" The car now stopt, the dwarf o'er Rezia wav'd
" His lily wand, and softly touch'd the maid—
" Off falls the hide! fair Rezia stands display'd:
" And, at his pray'r who thus her life had sav'd,
" She seats herself, half-pleas'd, with blushing mien,
" The friendly dwarf and beauteous knight between,
" Though love and struggling shame her bosom fill.
" And now the lion-car ascends the hill,
" Now strikes against a stone—swift flies the shadowy scene!

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XLVIII.

" The shadow flies, but from her heart again
" He never fled: the youth with golden hair—
" Eternally his image hovers there,
" Exhaustless source of sweetly-pensive pain,
" In nightly visions, and in day-dreams shown.
" Sithence our Drusi prince is loathsome grown,
" She hears, she sees him not without disdain—
" Vainly to search the cause all rack the brain:
" She broods in silent gloom, and heaves the secret groan!

XLIX.

" Alone her nurse, whose mother, sir, I am,
" Finds out the means, sad solace this at best,
" To wind the whisper'd secret from her breast,
" Which hourly prey'd upon her lovely lamb!
" You, sir, may judge on what uncertain ground
" Rests the slight hope, ah! still illusive found,
" To cure an ill whose torments strangely please:
" Sweet child! herself she nurtures the disease!
" And Fatma's flattering voice must hourly feed the wound.

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L.

" Yet, ah! the day of marriage nearer drew,
" And Babekan in vain his utmost tried
" To force out favour from the scornful bride;
" With each fresh effort fresh abhorrence grew:
" 'Twas known the fair in valour took delight,
" That brave men found distinction in her sight,
" He, in this shape, himself had never shewn:
" Here then, he thought, the princess is our own—
" Let us achieve a feat exceeding human might!

LI.

" Now, you must know, that since some time, a beast,
" A monster dread, has fill'd the realm with fear:
" In mid-day sunshine broad he dares appear,
" Lays waste our hamlets, and for daily feast
" Gorges both man and cattle—Sir, the thing
" Has, as they say, a dragon's scaly wing,
" Quills of a porcupine, and griffin claws,
" No elephant so huge, and from his jaws
" Fierce storms, whene'er he snorts, throughout the country ring!

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LII.

" Since memory of man so dread a beast
" Was ne'er till now by eye of mortal seen—
" Great price is fixt upon his head, I ween;
" But as each one prefers his own at least,
" No rash adventurers seek the golden meed.
' Our prince, who thinks if chance his arm succeed,
" That Rezia's scorn at once would melt away,
" Stalks to the Sultan's court in proud array,
" And begs his gracious leave to dare the desperate deed.

LIII.

" Reluctantly the caliph bow'd consent:
" This day, ere morning, Babekan bestrode
" His proudest steed, and forth adventurous rode.
" What past we know not: yet, whate'er th' event,
" Back to his house the hero slily came,
" On a strange horse, by stealth—and—much to blame,
" For, ah! not e'en a claw has blest our sight!
" 'Tis said he laid him down in piteous plight,
" And bezoar took—belike to sooth his bruised frame!

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LIV.

" Yet, with magnificence unknown before
" The marriage feast they joyfully prepare;
" To morrow's sun beholds the wedded pair,
" And Rezia, ere the fatal night be o'er,
" Sinks in his arms, a death-devoted bride!"—
' No!—ere that happens,' Huon rash replied,
' The wheel of the creation shall stand still!—
' Trust me, the dwarf his promise shall fulfil,
' The knight shall join the feast, whatever fate betide!'

LV.

The grandam, wond'ring at his answer, views
The stranger youth with close and closer gaze:
His eye of blue, his armour's knightly blaze,
His length of hair, that gleams with golden hues,
His face, the loveliest that e'er blest her eyes,
Voice, that in broken Arabick replies,
The fiery word that rash impatience spoke,
The likeness—each, and all, suspicion woke—
" 'Tis wonderful," she thinks, and stares in mute
surprise.

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LVI.

" Who is he?—whence? on what strange purpose
bent?"
Such thousand questions rushing into sound,
Sir Huon's earnest air in silence drown'd—
The knight, with soul-perplexing wonders rent,
Seeks his straw-bed, pretending needful rest:
She wishes him sweet dreams by angels blest,
And softly slips away—and shuts the door—
'Twas worn, worm-eaten, crackt at every pore—
How tempting to an ear by itching fiends possest!

LVII.

So back she slides, and closely as she can
Pressing against a crack her gaping ear,
Bends with wide mouth, and breathless lungs, to hear.
In vain she listens to the strange divan:
Tho' loud their speech, and warm each forceful word,
And every syllable distinctly heard,
'Twas all confusion to the Bagdad dame,
Save, now and then, to sooth her wo, the name
Of Rezia clearly sounds, by earnest lip preferr'd—

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LVIII.

" How wonderfully strange my fate unweaves!
" The spirit spoke it with presageful mind—
" How weak is man! and to the future blind!
" While Charles, with wicked hope his soul deceives,
" And deems my neck, ere this, of little worth,
" And that his word has rooted me from earth,
" The man but blindly works Fate's high command—
" The beauteous dwarf extends his lily wand,
" And guides me in a dream to joys of heavenly birth!"

LIX.

' And that the maid,' cries Sherasmin, ' descried
' In nightly visions that your senses fir'd,
' Should prove, by luck, the very one desir'd,
' The sultan's child, whom Charles had nam'd your bride;
' That she too burns, that dream to dream replies,
' In such a thing, man scarcely trusts his eyes!'—
" Strange though I grant it, yet this Bagdad dame
" She feign'd it not—Heaven blows the mutual flame,
" And fate's resistless hand the knot mysterious ties!

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LX.

" Now, how it may be loosen'd, there alone,
" My faithful friend, the difficulty lies!"—
' Sir,' answers Sherasmin, ' might I advise,
' I'd cut it short in twain—the day's our own—
' Him on the left, who feasts the king beside,
' Give the fine gentleman free passage wide,
' And all his grinders to the caliph leave:
' But to the beauteous maiden closely cleave—
' Cleave closely to the maid, and clasp the fated bride.

LXI.

' Only bethink yourself, before her sight
' To preface thus your courtship—'tis no joke
' That slicing off a head, sir, at a stroke!—
' Then, from the ancient gentleman, poor wight,
' To beg four grinders from his honour's jaws,
' And his gray silver beard to pluck like straws—
' Then—to embrace his child before his nose—
' It has no colour, sir!—Let none suppose
' Fate wills that we ourselves should thus defeat our cause.

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LXII.

'Tis well for us, that our protecting spright
'Has, long ere this, provided for the best—
'Now what remains; chief work, no doubt, confest,
'Is from that coxcomb of a prince, outright
'To blow away the angel—for this end
'Rezia herself will surely stand our friend,
'If rightly counsell'd of the yellow hair—
'I, for my part, two sprightly nags prepare,
'And, by the garden gate, at hand for flight attend.'—

LXIII.

"Sir Sherasmin," the knight replies, "it seems
"You quite forget the word I gave the king:
"All must be done, each tittle of the thing—
"Huon beyond his life his fame esteems!
"Not an iota shall be wanting, friend,
"Befall what may, my footsteps thither tend:
"Nor will I now anticipate the deed."—
'At least,' cries Sherasmin, 'in case of need,
'The dwarf must, ere we drown, a helping hand extend.'

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LXIV.

Insensibly the old man falls asleep—
But through the livelong night no soothing rest
Allays the pangs that burn in Huon's breast;
Like a canoe that dances on the deep,
His boding heart with palpitation high,
Mid thoughts that roll on thoughts tempestuously
Floats to and fro, as struggling passions war—
So near the port!—so near, and yet so far!
One moment—yet that one—it seems eternity!

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OBERON.

CANTO V.

I.

And, ah! sweet sleep from thee, O Rezia, flew,
For thou didst see thyself encompass'd round
With rocks, where hope itself no passage found!
How dreadful stole on thy reluctant view
The twilight dawn! How loath'd the roseate ray
That beam'd, sad victim! on thy bridal day!—
She sighs, she restless rolls, till, worn with woes,
Her drooping head in motionless repose
Sinks pillow'd on her breast—she swoons—and dies
away!

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II.

Then Oberon, her soul once more to raise,
Soft weaves anew a visionary dream
That round her forehead swims—beneath the beam
Silvering with streaks of light the leafy sprays,
She seems within the harem's green alcove
Sunk in warm fancies of enchanting love—
Sweet restless wishes, sadly-pleasing fears,
Now heave her breast, and dim her eye in tears,
While, to the youth ador'd, her thoughts desponding
rove.

III.

Rous'd by distress, with swift unquiet pace,
She searches groves and lawns array'd in flow'rs,
Still cool retreats, deep grots, and shadowy bow'rs:
And as she strays unblest, from place to place,
Her eye with tender wildness, to and fro,
Seems from all nature, witness of her wo,
To ask some traces of that lovely knight:
Oft mute she stops, oft starts with pale delight
If but a shadow wave, a night-air gently blow.

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IV.

Now, while she turns to a sequester'd seat,
Where bright the splendour of the full orb'd rays
Breaks through the night of thick inwoven sprays,
She thinks—oh, happiness! if no deceit,
No shadowy light delusive blind her eye,
How willingly deceiv'd! she sees him nigh—
She sees, is seen—their looks each other fire:
Forward she springs, impell'd by warm desire,
Stops—falters—tranc'd with love, and shame that fain
would fly—

V.

He springs with open arms to clasp the fair—
Fain would she fly, her limbs refuse to move:
A tree's thick shade scarce veils her from her love;
In sweetest wo the vision melts in air.
How longs she to recall the youth again!
Herself, the tree, she loathes, and tries in vain
To rock herself once more in soothing sleep,
Once more in magick dreams her senses steep—
Ah! but to trace the past, what other joys remain?

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VI.

Now flam'd the sun with high-ascending beam,
Yet still with Rezia it was ever night:
While her charm'd soul mid visions of delight,
Wove in her waking hours anew the dream.
Yet Fatma, for her lovely charge afraid,
(All signs of life, that day so long delay'd,)
Undraws the curtain of her golden bed,
And wond'ring views, by ling'ring day-dreams fed,
The smile of roseate joy illume th' enchanted maid.

VII.

"Yes, I have seen him, seen the lovely youth—
"Wish, wish me joy!" transported Rezia cries.
'Indeed!' and round she rolls her cunning eyes,
As if to spy the beauteous knight forsooth—
The damsel smiles:—"Thy wits are lost, 'tis plain:
"Fatma, such words, methinks themselves explain;
"I saw him—but 'twas only in a dream,
"Yet truth itself less certain I esteem—
"Dear youth! thou hover'st near, nor are such visions vain!

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VIII.

" Oh! trust these bodings—sure he hovers near—
" If thou but love me, cease my warmth to blame!"—
' Yes—I am silent'—" Why, why desperate name
" The only gleams of hope that misery cheer?
" Oh! let me feed the hope that life sustains!"
Poor Fatma sighs, and sadly mute remains—
" What can the omnipotence of love withstand?
" O'er me the lion-tamer holds his hand:
" And, though I know not how, will break the nuptial chains—

IX.

" Yet thou art silent—yet thou sigh'st—too well
" My soul, that silence and that sigh conceives!
" Sad o'er my fruitless flame thy spirit grieves,
" And I on hope, perhaps delusive, dwell,
" Since hope alone to sooth my wo is found!
" The hour draws near—the chains already sound—
" Turn where I will, destruction hovers there!
" What but a wonder saves me from despair?
" But, if a wonder fail—lo! here my hopes are crown'd!"

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x.

She speaks; and at the word with look elate,
Forth from her bosom draws the lifted steel—
" Here! seest thou? this re-animates my zeal!
" This lifts me high above the reach of fate,
" This frees my spirit from terrestrial might!"—
Poor Fatma thrills with horrour at the sight;
Turns pale as death, and trembles like a reed—
' Help! gracious Heaven! prevent the desperate deed!'
And weeps, and wrings her hands, and shrieks with wild affright.

xi.

The princess seals her lip with cautious fear—
" Hush!—silence—let the storm of passion rest!"
And hides again the dagger in her breast.
" Thou know'st throughout the world's extensive sphere,
" Nought like the loathsome Drusi prince I hate!
" Ere that detested man becomes my mate,
" A deadly snake shall twine around these arms!
" Ah! if the knight redeem not Rezia's charms,
" What but the steel remains to fly malignant fate?"

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XII.

Scarce had she said, when suddenly they hear
One who loud knocks at Fatma's little door;
The careful nurse, impatient to explore,
Flies at the sound, and back with swift career,
Hastes in wild raptures that her speech impede—
'Joy! we are rescu'd in the hour of need—
'Joy!' she exclaims with interrupted breath:
'No more of Babekan, the steel, and death—
'The stranger youth is ours, the knight is found
indeed!'

XIII.

Veil'd in her night-robe, that with wavy play
Roll'd like a mist, and scarce conceal'd her charms,
The princess springs from bed in Fatma's arms—
"Found! where?—sweet dream! thou art not fled
away!
"Thou hast not then my trusting soul betray'd?"—
Fatma herself, by rapture frantick made,
Scarce slips her neck from Rezia's eager hold,
And scarce has time to veil in decent fold
The charms that, wild with joy, the dreamer half display'd.

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XIV.

And now the happy crone is hurried in,
Herself the proud narratress of the tale:
She suffers not a circumstance to fail,
Though from the very egg her words begin.
Each trait, each look, each motion of her guest,
Is in her painting, line by line exprest.
" We have him!" Fatma cries, " 'tis he, our man!
" In each, and all, he tallies with our plan—
" Heaven, that has sent the knight, will sure provide
the rest."

XV.

The tale scarce told, the grandam, ask'd anew,
Repeats the wondrous story o'er again:
What done, what said, not said—eternal strain!
And ever paints the form the vision drew:
Trac'd trait by trait: the same his graceful air,
The same the radiance of his golden hair,
The same that large fine eye of heavenly blue.
Yet still some feature that escap'd her view
Demands a heightening tint, and stroke of closer care.

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XVI.

While thus she talks herself, the grandam gay,
More young by twenty years, each clust'ring braid
Of Rezia's hair by Fatma's skill display'd,
Beneath her finger winds in wavy play.
Mid ebon locks her fingers intertwine
Pearls that more bright than glist'ning dew-drops shine.
Her ear-rings, necklace, seem one diamond stone,
Her girdle studded like the starry zone—
What eye, when flames the sun, can bear her blaze divine?

XVII.

Now, by her virgins, as a bride array'd,
Bright as the day, and lovely as a roe
That feeds on lawns where roses only blow,
Deckt for the feast appears the radiant maid:
No eye undazzled o'er her beauty strays,
Though on her beauty none but virgins gaze.
Rezia herself unconscious seems alone
Of charms, that all, save her, resistless own:
Unconscious that each star must fade beneath her blaze!

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XVIII.

The flame that lightens from her sparkling eyes,
Lips swelling with the warmth of young desire,
Soft cheek suffus'd with unaccustom'd fire,
And bosom gently heav'd by willing sighs,
Amaze the virgins that her charms adorn—
" Is this," the whisper ran, " the maid forlorn?
" This, whom we late beheld, th' obdurate bride,
" Who in her anguish heav'n and earth defied,
" And more than death itself abhorr'd the nuptial morn?"

XIX.

Emirs, and viziers, all the courtly crowd
Meantime attendant at the sultan's call,
With festal splendour grace the nuptial hall.
The banquet waits—the cymbals clang aloud,
The gray-beard caliph from his golden door
Stalks mid the slaves that fall his path before:
Behind, of stately gesture, proud to view,
The Drusi prince, though somewhat pale of hue,
Comes as a bridegroom deck'd, with jewels blazing o'er.

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XX.

And, opposite, the ivory door unfolds,
That from the harem to the palace leads,
And lo! the fascinating pride proceeds,
More fair, than Mahom's paradise beholds
The houri, seen in visionary dreams.
Temper'd to mortal eye her beauty gleams
Beneath a veil, that, like the silver gray
Of twilight vapour, shades its dazzling ray:
Yet as she steps, the hall with héavenly lustre streams!

XXI.

The bridegroom's hears now swells and sinks by turns,
As hangs his gaze in rapture on her charms:
No boding consciousness the prince alarms,
Though, while he views, his ardent eye discerns
Pale Rezia's look, more cold than Alpine snow;
Yet fir'd by vanity his spirits glow:
Her self-deceiving hues that never fail,
Paint love conceal'd beneath that icy veil,
Which, sure, shall melt at night, and warm with bliss o'erflow:

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XXII.

If hope deceiv'd the prince, shall soon appear:
Not this the time superfluous things to trace.
How at the ending of the Iman's grace,
Amid the clang that deafen'd every ear,
Cymbals, and cornets, in imperial pride
First sat the sultan, at his right the bride,
The bridegroom at his left—such things explain
Themselves untold—I gladly bend the strain
To tell what turns of fate our gallant knight betide.

XXIII.

Fever'd by restless bodings, foe to sleep,
Not softer on the straw the night he past,
Than the poor ship-boy on the giddy mast,
Rock'd by the billows of the stormy deep:
But scarcely did Aurora's rosy hand
The golden portals of the day expand,
Than, like a mist, the soft descending dews
That poppies, lilacks, lilies, round diffuse,
Sunk on his closing eye, and bath'd in slumber bland.

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XXIV.

Calm he reposes in unbroken sleep,
Till the fleet chariot of the flaming sun
Had half its course through heaven's wide circle run;
But Sherasmin steals forth with wary pace
To spy the castle's site, and all provide,
Swift at the word to carry off the bride.
Meanwhile their hostess with officious cares
O'er her small hearth the mid-day meal prepares,
Yet, inly-murmuring, seem'd her lazy guest to chide.

XXV.

She totters to the door, and chanc'd to peep
Just at the time, when, happily descried,
Amid inviting crannies gaping wide,
Sir Huon rising from enchanted sleep,
His eye first open'd on the golden day;
Fresh as the lovely form of youthful May
(When nymphs and graces in the choir unite)
Steps forth to dance, half-rais'd he met her sight—
Now guess what scene at first his opening eyes survey!

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XXVI.

A caftan, such as highest emirs wear,
In courtly splendour for the feast array'd,
With pearls in many a knot of curious braid,
Broider'd on golden tissue rich and rare;
A turban woven, as from virgin snow;
And near it, to complete the emir show,
A diamond girdle whence a sabre plays,
Whose sheath and hilt in ever-dazzling rays,
Half-blind the eye confus'd beneath its sun-like glow!

XXVII.

In every ornament, from head to foot,
Down from the diamond button that illumes
The turban shadow'd o'er with ostrich plumes,
To the gilt leather of the little boot,
There, nothing fail'd—he thinks, enchanted knight!
That visionary dreams deceive his sight—
The grandam cries, "There's witchery in the scene,
"Or I had, doubtless, in the secret been."—
'Ay,' Sherasmin exclaims, ''tis he! the friendly spright!'

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XXVIII.

So thinks our knight, and that amid the crowd
'Twill clear his passage to the nuptial hall:
Then clothes himself with caftan, girdle, all—
The hostess prides herself to prank him out—
" But for this turban here, this puzzling fold!
" Ah! must we clip these beauteous locks of gold?
" Dare, dare not for the world that heinous sin—
" O stop! 'Twill do—it goes all well within:
" Heaven sure its circle form'd those lovely curls to hold!"

XXIX.

Our knight, in all except his beardless cheek,
Shines like a sultan for the banquet crown'd:
The grandam ever eyes him round and round,
And pranks anew, and smooths with finger sleek;
But when his squire, by secret boding prest,
Had in his ear some whisper'd words addrest,
Forth Huon goes, impatient for the deed,
And gifts his hostess kind with golden meed—
" Adieu! till next we meet, and Heaven provide the rest!"

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XXX.

As fays not sparingly their favourites aid,
A stately courser at the cottage door
Champs, with gay trappings richly cover'd o'er.
Two beauteous youths in silver cloth array'd
Wait at the stirrups, bright with burnish'd gold—
Up vaults the knight; the boys before him hold
Their nimble course, through secret pathways guide,
Rich meads fair blooming by Euphrates' side:
Till his impatient eyes the imperial tow'r behold.

XXXI.

Now thro' the outward court swift speeds the knight,
Within the second from his steed descends;
Along the third his pace majestick bends;
Where'er he enters, dazzled by his sight,
The guards make way—his gait, his dress, his air,
A nuptial guest of highest rank declare.
Now he advances tow'rds an ebon gate,
Where with drawn swords twelve moors gigantick wait,
And piece-meal hack the wretch who steps unbidden there.

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XXXII.

But the bold gesture and imperial mien
Of Huon, as he opes the lofty door,
Drive back the swords that cross'd his path before,
And at his entrance flam'd with lightning sheen.
At once with rushing noise the valves unfold:
High throbs the bosom of our hero bold,
When, lock'd behind him, harsh the portals bray;
Through gardens deck'd with columns leads the way,
Where tower'd a gate incas'd with plates of massy gold.

XXXIII.

There, a large fore-court held a various race
Of slaves, a hapless race, sad harem slaves,
Who die of thirst mid joy's o'erflowing waves!
And when a man whom emir honours grace,
Swells in his state before their hollow eye,
Breathless they bend, with looks that seem to die
Beneath the weight of servitude opprest:
Bow down with folded arms across the breast,
Nor dare look up to mark the pomp that glitters by.

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XXXIV.

Already cymbals, drums, and fifes resound,
With song and string the festive palace clangs,
The sultan's head already heavy hangs,
While vinous vapours float his brain around:
Already mirth in freer current flows,
And the gay bridegroom, wild with rapture, glows.
Then, as the bride, in horrour turn'd away,
Casts on the ground her looks that never stray,
Huon along the hall with noble freedom goes.

XXXV.

Now to the table he advances nigh,
And with uplifted brow in wild amaze
Th' admiring guests upon the stranger gaze:
Fair Rezia tranc'd with fascinated eye,
Still views her dream, and ever downward bends:
The sultan, busy with the bowl, suspends
All other thoughts; prince Babekan alone,
Warn'd by no vision, tow'rds the guest unknown,
All fearless of his fate his length of neck extends.

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XXXVI.

Soon as Sir Huon's scornful eyes retrace
The man of yesterday, that he, the same
Who lately dar'd the Christian God defame,
Sits at the left, high-plum'd in bridal grace,
And bows the neck as conscious of his guilt:
Swift as the light he grasps the sabre's hilt;
Off at the instant flies the heathen's head!
And o'er the caliph and the banquet shed,
Up spirts his boiling blood, by dreadful vengeance spilt!

XXXVII.

As the dread visage of Medusa fell
Swift flashing on the sight, with instant view
Deprives of life the wild-revolted crew;
While reeks the tow'r with blood, while tumults swell,
And murderous frenzy fierce and fiercer grown,
Glares in each eye, and maddens every tone—
At once, when Perseus shakes the viper hair,
Each dagger stiffens as it hangs in air,
And every murderer stands transform'd to living stone!

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XXXVIII.

Thus at the view of this audacious feat,
The jocund blood that warm'd each merry guest
Suspends its frozen course in every breast:
Like ghosts, in heaps, all shiv'ring from their seat
They start, and grasp their swords, and mark their prey;
But shrunk by fear, their vigour dies away:
Each in its sheath their swords remain at rest:
With powerless fury in his look exprest,
Mute sunk the caliph back, and star'd in wild dismay.

XXXIX.

The uproar which confounds the nuptial hall
Forces the dreamer from her golden trance:
Round her she gazes with astonish'd glance,
While yells of frantick rage her soul appal:
But as she turns her face tow'rds Huon's side
How throbs his bosom, when he sees his bride!—
"'Tis she—'tis she herself!" he wildly calls:
Down drops the bloody steel; the turban falls!
And Rezia knows her knight, as float his ringlets wide.

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XL.

'Tis he!' she wild exclaims: yet virgin shame
Stops in her rosy mouth th' imperfect sound:
How throbs her heart! what thrillings strange confound!
When with impatient speed the stranger came,
And, love-embolden'd, with presumptuous arms
Clasp'd in the sight of all her angel charms!
And, oh! how fiery red, how deadly pale
Her cheek, as love and maiden fear assail,
The while he kist her lip that glow'd with sweet alarms!

XLI.

Twice had his lip already kiss'd the maid—
"Where shall the bridal ring, oh! where be found?"
Lo! by good fortune, as he gazes round,
The elfine ring shines suddenly display'd,
Won from the giant of the iron tow'r:—
Now, all unconscious of its magick power,
This ring, so seeming base, th' impatient knight
Slips on her finger, pledge of nuptial rite.
"With this, O bride belov'd! I wed thee from this hour!"

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XLII.

Then, for the third time, at these words, again
The bridegroom kist the soft reluctant fair:
The sultan storms and stamps in wild despair—
'Thou suffer'st, then—inexpiable stain!
'This Christian dog to shame thy nuptial day?—
'Seize, seize him, slaves!—ye die, the least delay!
'Haste! drop by drop, from every throbbing vein,
'By lengthen'd agonies his life-blood drain—
'Thus shall the pangs of hell his monstrous guilt repay!'

XLIII.

At once in flames before Sir Huon's eyes,
A thousand weapons glitter at the word!
And, ere our hero snatches up his sword,
On every side the death-storms fiercely rise!
On every side he turns his brandish'd blade—
By love and anguish wild, at once the maid
Around him wreaths her arm, his shield her breast,
Seizes his sword, by her alone represt—
"Back! daring slaves!" she cries, "I, I the hero aid—

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XLIV.

"Back!—to that breast—here, here the passage lies!
"No other way than through the midst of mine!"—
And she who lately seem'd love's bride divine,
Now flames a Gorgon with Medusa's eyes!
And ever, as the emirs near enclose,
She dares with fearless breast their swords oppose.
"Spare him, my father! spare him! and, O thou!
"Destin'd by fate to claim my nuptial vow,
"Spare him!—in both your lives the blood of Rezia flows!"

XLV.

The sultan's frenzy rages uncontroll'd:
Fierce on Sir Huon storm the murderous train;
Yet still his glittering falchion flames in vain,
While Rezia's gentle hand retains its hold:
Her agonizing shrieks his bosom rend;
And what remains the princess to defend—
What but the horn can rescue her from death?
Soft through the ivory flows his gentle breath,
And from its spiry folds sweet fairy tones ascend.

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XLVI.

Soon as its magick sounds, the powerless steel
Falls without struggle from the lifted hand:
In rash vertigo turn'd, the emir band
Wind arm in arm, and spin the giddy reel:
Throughout the hall tumultuous echoes ring,
All, old and young, each heel has Hermes' wing:
No choice is left them by the fairy tone:
Pleas'd and astonish'd Rezia stands alone
By Huon's side unmov'd, while all around them spring.

XLVII.

The whole divan, one swimming circle glides
Swift without stop: the old bashaws click time.
As if on polish'd ice, in trance sublime
The iman hoar with some spruce courtier slides.
Nor rank nor age from capering refrain;
Nor can the king his royal foot restrain!
He too must reel amid the frolick row,
Grasp the grand vizier by his beard of snow,
And teach the aged man once more to bound amain!

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XLVIII.

The dancing melodies ne'er heard before,
From every crowded antichamber round,
First draw the eunuchs forth with airy bound,
The women next, and slaves that guard the door.
Alike the merry madness seizes all.
The harem's captives at the magick call
Trip gaily to the tune, and whirl the dance:
In party-colour'd shirts the gard'ners prance,
Rush mid the youthful nymphs, and mingle in the ball.

XLIX.

Entranc'd, with fearful joy, while doubt alarms,
Fair Rezia stands almost depriv'd of breath—
" What wonder! at the time, when instant death,
" Hangs o'er us, that a dance the god disarms!
" A dance thus rescues from extreme distress!"
' Some friendly genius deigns our union bless!'
Sir Huon says: meanwhile amid the throng
With eager step darts Sherasmin along,
And tow'rds them Fatma hastes unnotice'd through
the press.

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L.

" Haste!" Sherasmin exclaims, " not now the hour
" To pry with curious leisure on the dance—
" All is prepar'd—the steeds impatient prance—
" While raves the castle, while unbarr'd the tow'r,
" And every gate wide open, why delay?
" By luck I met dame Fatma on the way,
" Close pack'd, like beast of burthen, for the flight."—
' Peace! 'tis not yet the time!' replies the knight,
' A dreadful task impends—for that must Huon stay.'

LI.

Pale Rezia shudders at the dreadful sound:
And looks with longing eye, that seems to say,
" Why, on the brink of ruin, why delay?
" Oh, hasten! let our footsteps fly the ground,
" Ere bursts the transient charm that binds their brain,
" And rage and vengeance repossess the train!"
Huon, who reads the language of her eyes,
With looks of answering love alone replies,
Clasps to his heart her hand, nor dares the deed
explain.

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LII.

And now the fairy tones to soft repose
Melt in the air; each head swims giddy round,
And every limb o'ertir'd forgets to bound;
Wet every thread, and every pore o'erflows.
The breath half-stopt scarce heaves with struggling pain,
The drowsy blood slow creeps through every vein;
Involuntary joy, like torture, thrills:
The king, as from a bath, in streams distils,
And pants upon his couch, amid th' exhausted train.

LIII.

Stiff, without motion, scarce with sense endued,
Down, one by one, th' o'erweary'd dancers fall,
Where swelling bolsters heave around the wall:
Emirs, and lowly slaves, in contrast rude
Mix with the harem goddesses, as chance
Tangles the mazes of the frantick dance.
At once together by a whirlwind blown,
On the same bed, in ill-pair'd union thrown,
The groom and favourite lie confus'd in breathless trance.

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LIV.

Sir Huon, mindful of the fav'ring hour,
While rests in peaceful silence all around,
Pursues his task by plighted promise bound:
Leaves his fair angel in the old man's pow'r,
Gives him the ivory horn, and cautions well
By timely use the danger to repel;
Then boldly hastens forward to the place
Where gasps the sultan wearied with the race,
And heaving with his breath the billowy pillows swell.

LV.

In awful silence, with expanded wings,
Soft-breathing expectation stilly broods;
And, though by fits, thick drowsiness intrudes,
The languid dancers that surround the king,
Strive to unbolt their slumber-closing eye
To view the stranger as he passes by;
Who, after such a deed, with hand unarm'd,
And courteous posture, ventures unalarm'd
To front the lightning glance of injur'd majesty.

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LVI.

Low on his knee Sir Huon humbly bends;
With cool heroick look, and gentle tone
Begins—" Imperial Charles, before whose throne
" I bow, his faithful vassal hither sends,
" To hail thee, Asia's lord! with greeting fair,
" And beg—forgive, what duty bids declare—
" (For, as my arm, my tongue obeys his laws—)
" And beg—great sir!—four grinders from your jaws,
" And from your reverend beard a lock of silver hair!"

LVII.

He speaks it, and is silent—and stands still,
In expectation of the sultan's word.
Soon as the caliph had the message heard—
—But words, alas! are wanting to my will;
I cannot paint, while pride and rage conspire,
How every feature writhes with maniack ire—
How from his throne he darts, how fiercely stares,
How from his eye incessant lightning glares,
While every bursting vein high boils with living fire.

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LVIII.

He stares, would curse, but fury uncontroll'd
In his blue lip breaks short th' imperfect sound—
" Tear out his heart! to dust the villain pound!
" Hack, hack him limb by limb, a thousand fold!
" With searching awls explore each secret vein!
" Crack joint by joint, each tortur'd sinew strain!
" Roast him—to all the winds his ashes cast!
" Him, and his emperour Charles, whom lightnings blast!
" Teeth! beard!—beneath this roof!—to me!—it burns my brain!

LIX.

" Who is this Charles, who thus presumptuous dares
" Against us swell himself? Why comes he not,
" Since thus he longs, in person, on the spot,
" To take my grinders, and my silver hairs?"—
' Ah, ah!' exclaims a hoary-headed kan,
' Whate'er he be, no doubt, that mighty man
' Is not with overweight of brains opprest!
' He should at least, who makes the mad request,
' In front of myriads march, then execute the plan.'

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LX.

" Caliph of Bagdad," says the tranquil knight,
With noble pride, " let all be silent here!
" Mark me—the emperour's awful task severe,
" And the bold promise that I dar'd to plight,
" Long on my soul, ere now, have heavy sate:
" Yet bitter, monarch! is the force of fate!
" What pow'r on earth her sov'reignty withstands?
" Whate'er to do or suffer fate commands,
" Must be perform'd, and born, with patient mind
sedate.

LXI.

" Here stand I, like thyself, a mortal man,
" Alone, in proud defiance of thy train,
" At risk of life my honour to maintain:
" Yet honour bids propose another plan—
" Abjure thy faith—from Mahomet recede,
" With pious lip profess the Christian creed;
" Erect the cross in all these Eastern lands:
" So wilt thou more perform than Charles demands;
" Charles shall remain content, and thou from trouble
freed.

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LXII.

" Yes, on myself the terms I undertake,
" No rash offence shall wound imperial pride:
" And he who dares these holy terms deride,
" Shall in my blood at will his vengeance slake.
" Thus young, thus lonely, as thou seest me here,
" Thy own experience, caliph, makes it clear,
" That some unseen protector guides my way:
" He can the rage of all thy host allay:
" Choose then the better part, and bow to truth thine ear."

LXIII.

Like a commission'd angel of the skies,
In awful beauty and commanding mien,
While Huon stands by wond'ring mortals seen,
And though destruction flames before his eyes,
Speaks his high mandate with unshaken mind:
Rezia, from far, tow'rds him alone inclin'd,
Her beauteous neck in graceful guise extends,
Tow'rds him her cheek by love illumin'd bends,
Yet fearful how at last these wonders will unwind.

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LXIV.

Scarce had our knight the last proposal made,
Than the old caliph, hell within his breast,
Raves, shrieks, and stamps the ground, like one possest:
On each swoln feature frenzy stood display'd:
Not less enrag'd around their fiery king
Up from their seats at once the Pagans spring,
And foam, and threat, and horrid vengeance swear!
Swords, lances, daggers, clatter in the air,
All press on Mahom's foe, and closely round enring.

LXV.

On as they rush, th' intrepid knight in haste
Wrenches a pole from one that near him stood,
And arm'd as with a mace, in fearless mood,
Where'er he swings it spreads destructive waste:
Thus, ever fighting, presses near the wall.
A golden bowl, that grac'd the banquet hall,
Serves him at once for weapon and for shield:
Already to his might the foremost yield,
And stretch'd before his feet the gasping heathens fall!

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LXVI.

Brave Sherasmin, the guardian of the fair,
Who thinks he views amid the press afar
His former lord victorious in the war,
Glows at the scene with wild triumphant air:
But rous'd by Rezia's agonizing cries,
The fond delusion of the dreamer flies;
He sees the youth close girt by heathen foes—
Sets to his lip the horn, and loudly blows,
As one by heaven ordain'd to bid the dead arise.

LXVII.

Loud rings the castle with rebellowing shocks;
Night, tenfold midnight, swallows up the day;
Ghosts, to and fro, like gleams of lightning play,
The stony basis of the turret rocks!
Clap after clap, and peals on peals resound:
Terrours unknown, the heathen race confound!
Sight, hearing lost, they stagger, drunk with fear;
Drops from each nerveless hand the sword and spear,
And stiff upon the spot all lie in groups around.

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LXVIII.

With miracle on miracle opprest,
The caliph struggles with the pangs of death;
His arm hangs loose, deep drawn his heavy breath,
Scarce beats his pulse, it flutters, sinks to rest.
At once the storm is hush'd that roar'd so loud;
While sweetly breathing o'er the prostrate crowd,
A lily vapour sheds around perfume,
And, like an angel image on a tomb,
The fairy spright appears, array'd in silver cloud!

LXIX.

A mingled shriek of terrour and desire
From Rezia bursts—a strange sensation awes:
A trembling trust, and hopes that frequent pause,
Temper at once the ardour they inspire.
Pensive, with lifeless arms that cross her breast,
By virgin shame her wishes half-suppress,
Near the fond youth she stands, and fears to move,
And sweetly conscious of the crime of love,
Dares scarce behold the dwarf with stealing glance distrest.

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LXX.

" Thou hast fulfill'd the word by honour giv'n,
" Intrepid Huon!—I am well content—
" How glorious the reward to virtue sent!
" The lovely bride is thine, best gift of heaven—
" Yet, ere thou waft her from her native shore,
" Let her with cool reflection o'er and o'er
" Pause, lest in after time, the maid in vain
" Of the seduction of her eyes complain!
" Fate leaves her free to choose—but now—and never more.

LXXI.

" Can Rezia, then, without a sigh, forego
" Pow'r, riches, pomp, her court, and native throne,
" Mid the wide world, thro' dangerous seas unknown
" To plunge adventurous in the storms of wo?
" To love but him alone, with him await,
" Fearless each dread vicissitude of fate!
" And, ah! perchance, by sad experience, prove
" How oft affliction flows from him we love!
" Oh! question well thy heart! reflect, ere yet too late!

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LXXII.

" Yet if this dangerous flight thy soul alarm,
" Bid love's delusive visions melt away!
" These sleepers, seeming dead, without delay
" Rise at the waving of my potent arm—
" How willingly, the past no longer known,
" The sultan shall again his daughter own,
" And to his fond embrace his child restore;
" And Rezia, great and glorious as before,
" O'er all shall reign ador'd, the pride of Asia's throne!"

LXXIII.

Here the fair dwarf was silent—pale as death
Sir Huon stands, and waits th' impending doom
That Oberon threats—hope dares no more presume—
How fades his fiery cheek! how fails his breath!
The knight too noble, or too proud, perchance,
With love's delusive witchcraft to entrance
A doubtful heart, mute looks upon the ground,
And buries in his soul each pang profound:
Nor dares to sway her choice by one seductive glance.

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LXXIV.

Yet, his first kiss, still thrilling in her heart,
Requires no other aid to swell the flame:
Wealth, glory, splendour, all an empty name:
From these it little seems at once to part,
So the enchanted maid her Huon keeps:
With shame and love o'erpower'd she fondly weeps,
And hides her burning face on Huon's breast;
While rais'd to meet his heart, with rapture prest,
High swells her glowing heart, and 'gainst his bosom leaps.

LXXV.

And gently o'er them Oberon extends
His lily wand, as if in act to place
His nuptial blessing, as their hearts embrace.
Soft from his eye a stealing tear descends
On both their brows—"So haste, thou matchless pair
"On wings of love, my car, that cuts the air,
"Shall waft you high above terrestrial sight,
"And place, ere morning melt the shades of night,
"On Askalon's far shore, beneath my guardian care."

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OBERON, CANTO V.

Vol. I. Page 172.

H. Fuseli, R.A. Invent.

J. Heath, Sculp.

Published March 1st 1806, by Cadell & Davies, Strand.

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LXXVI.

He spoke—and ere the last expiring sound
Dissolv'd at distance, vanish'd from her sight!
As if new-wak'd from visions of delight,
The lovely bride, while fragrance floats around,
Pants with warm lip, desirous to inhale
The breathing odours of the lily gale:
Then, with side-glance upon her father cast,
Who seems in slumb'rous death to stare aghast,
She sighs, while stealing woes by fits her heart assail.

LXXVII.

In pensive thought she wraps herself around.
No sooner, keen with love, our knight perceives
How his wan bride with inward anguish grieves,
Views her faint eye, and hears her sigh profound,
Than with sweet violence, and fond alarm
Round her he folds his soft-constraining arm,
And steals her from the hall—"Oh, come, ere night
"Surprise us, and once more, to bar our flight,
"The dread avengers rise, now bound by fairy charm!

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LXXVIII.

" Haste! let us fly, ere, chance, some hostile band
" Now unforeseen, our vent'rous flight impede—
" And, oh! be sure, when once from peril freed,
" We rest in peace upon a distant land,
" Our guardian spirit will these slumberers aid!"
He speaks, and lifts from earth the silent maid:
And down the marble steps with youthful might
Bears to the fairy chariot, wing'd for flight—
Sure never earthly arm so fair a form convey'd!

LXXIX.

A fearful silence through the castle reigns:
Still as the grave, and peaceful as the dead,
The guards lie here and there around them spread:
No mortal pow'r the blissful pair restrains.
They mount the car—'tis love's celestial throne;
Yet Rezia dares not trust herself alone:
There with quick footstep Sherasmin ascends,
Kind Fatma there her lovely charge attends,
And, wild with wonder, hastes to distant scenes unknown.

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LXXX.

How is it! when she backward bends, and views
Four swans, for horses, stretch'd before her sight,
Rein'd by a child that guides their pathless flight!
How, when the dwarf th' aërial course pursues,
Her restless eyes that roll amazement, note
O'er earth's dim speck the self-rais'd chariot float!
She views, yet doubts, nor ever comprehends
Heavily laden, how the car ascends,
And cuts the clouds secure, as sails a well-pois'd boat!

LXXXI.

But when the shades of night fall thick around,
What wonder then! as fear surpasses shame,
That on the squire so closely leans the dame,
As on a pillow hugg'd in sleep profound—
Perhaps the man is mov'd with strange desire:
Contact so close may well some warmth inspire;
And nature freely mingles in the game—
Yet, his bright virtue melts not in the flame,
But pure as purest gold, sustains the test of fire.

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LXXXII.

Far other thoughts inspire the youthful pair,
Whom love with Cytherea's swans conveys—
Whether they speed along unwonted ways,
Wing'd through the pathless regions of the air;
Whether they roll on earth, or swim the main;
Whether with flying course, or flagging rein;
How born, thro' rough or smooth, by swan or steed;
What perils threaten, or what scenes succeed;
Of these no transient thought e'er flits across the brain.

LXXXIII.

A dream of bliss unknown, a new delight,
Joys that in Paradise the blest await,
Seem but the shadow of their happy state—
What can they, but with fixt unsated sight
Each on the other gaze—no word exprest—
Their hands, and meeting hearts in rapture prest;
And ask, while heaven and earth away are flown,
And they of all creation left alone,
"Is it one car thus holds?—or dream we, fancy-blest?"

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LXXXIV.

" It was no dream then," each enamour'd says,
" When first I saw thee in the nightly shade!
" So Rezia smil'd, so Huon stood display'd!—
" Some god directed our mysterious ways.
" Thou mine?—I thine?—could hope thus highly soar?
" So strangely met!—and never, never more
" To part!—can souls on earth such joy sustain?"—
Then in each other lost they gaze again,
And mingle lips and hearts, and silently adore.

LXXXV.

In vain the night with vapour-laden wing
Inwraps the viewless canopy above;
No darkness dims th' all-seeing power of love—
Their eyes, whence rays of light celestial spring,
Each in the other fixt, their souls behold.
Night is not night to them—but ever roll'd
Heaven and Elysium, round and round them flow—
Their sunshine from within expands its glow:
And rous'd at every look, new senses sweet unfold!

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LXXXVI.

The boundless transports gradually decay,
And rock th' o'erflowing heart in charmed sleep.
Delicious dews the languid eyelid steep,
And sweet oblivion steals each sense away,
The spirit from its body seems disjoin'd,
In one sole feeling center'd, clasp'd, combin'd—
In that, all breath, all life, all sense, all soul;
Center'd in one the comprehensive whole,
In one alone—but, oh! that one how unconfin'd!

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OBERON.

CANTO VI.

I.

SCARCE had Aurora chas'd the shades of night,
And with her rosy finger, dipt in dew,
Unbarr'd the gates of day to mortal view,
Than underneath the palm-wood's shelt'ring height,
Not far from Askalon's sea-bounded strand,
Th' aërial steeds descending touch the land;
The rocking wheels with soft vibration shake:
At once from sleep the faithful followers wake,
But these from waking dreams by love's light plumage
fann'd.

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II.

The sultan's daughter starts in sweet amaze,
While, in the splendour of the morn array'd,
With golden gleams the world of waters play'd,
That ne'er till now had roll'd before her gaze—
Charm'd, full of wonder, darts her boundless glance
At distance where the waves to heaven advance:
Immensity seems spread before her sight!
Yet awful shudders temper the delight,
To see herself, how small! amid the vast expanse!

III.

A gray mist floats her wilder'd sight before—
"Where am I?"—but at once, Sir Huon there,
Who waited by the car, and watch'd the fair,
On earth's green lap to fix her foot once more,
Recalls her spirit to its seat again—
'Oh, tremble not!' he cries, 'thy fear restrain!'—
And while he prints the tender kiss of love,
And strange alarms the maiden's bosom move,
'Here, in my arms repose!—here rest from terrours vain!'

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IV.

Again with love and joy supremely crown'd,
In Huon's warm embrace she scarcely breathes.
Not link'd with closer twine young ivy wreathes
Her flexile shoot the wedded stem around,
Than with fond clasp her arms the youth enring.
Where overshadowing palms cool shelter fling,
Soft on the pillowy moss he seats his bride;
And as he lies enchanted by her side,
Would not exchange his seat with Cæsar or with king.

V.

There Sherasmin and Fatma soon are found,
Resolv'd, through every hazard, true till death,
To serve the lovers with their latest breath—
And while the squire repos'd upon the ground
Before his lord, and happy Fatma smil'd
Close by the knee of her delighted child,
More swift than fancy's transitory gleam,
Along the air, that glow'd with roseate beam,
The beauteous fairy swam in radiant glory mild.

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VI.

Soon as he views them, friendship's soften'd light
Breaks through the cloud of grief that dims his eye:
Serene in smiles he drew the lovers nigh,
And held a casket starr'd with jewels bright,
That like a sun-beam glitter'd in his hand—
" Take this, that far exceeds thy king's command,
" Proof of obedience to that rancorous lord,
" That thou hast all accomplish'd, word for word,
" Whene'er thy joyful foot regains its native land."

VII.

All must applaud this deed of fairy grace,
Which sav'd at once the honour of the knight,
And hid th' uncourteous act from Rezia's sight.
Close pack'd in cotton, in this precious case,
The sultan's silver beard and grinders lay:
These, on his couch when swoon'd the king away,
One of the wood-god's train, a viewless spright,
Who flew like lightning from his airy height,
Sans sheers, or pincers rude, had pluck'd without delay.

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VIII.

" Haste!" Oberon cries, " ere eager search prevails,
" Ere yet the king has time to trace your flight!
" Lo! in yon road a vessel lies in sight—
" Ere the sev'nth sun illumes her flying sails,
" Ye reach in safety far Lepanto's shore—
" A second, there equipt, shall waft you o'er
" Safe to Salerno's coast—then, quick as love,
" And warm desire your steps impatient move,
" Onward! to Rome, away!—there rest in peace
once more.

IX.

" And deep, O Huon! grave it in your brain!
" Till good Sylvester, pious father, sheds
" Heaven's holy consecration on your heads,
" As brother and as sister chaste remain!
" Oh! may ye not, with inauspicious haste,
" The fruit forbidden prematurely taste!
" Know, if ye rashly venture ere the time,
" That Oberon, in vengeance of your crime,
" Leaves you, without a friend, on life's deserted waste!"

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x.

He speaks, and sighs—still wo that inly grieves
Swells his dim eye—he bids his friends draw near,
Kisses their brow, and sheds on each a tear:
Then, like a figur'd cloud that fades at eve,
While steep'd in tears they raise their straining eyes,
Swift melting into air the fairy flies!—
The sun is veil'd, the palm-grove murmurs round,
And earth and sea in deep dull pause profound,
Exhale a mournful mist, whence shapeless shades arise.

xi.

A strange still wo the lovely pair subdues—
They, on each other, tranc'd in silence gaze,
Their cheeks all ghastly pale with dread amaze—
What each would speak, their falt'ring lips refuse:
Fain would they meet with clasping arms—in vain—
Terrours unknown their opening arms restrain:
But, in a moment flies the mist away,
Fair as before expands the golden day,
Hope paints anew their cheek, and pleasure smiles again.

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XII.

They haste, and overjoy'd the vessel find,
By touch invisible of fairy spright,
Fitted for use, and furnish'd for delight.
The streamers wave before the fav'ring wind:
The anchor weigh'd, joy rings from side to side—
Swift as expanded wings the air divide,
Mid the blue flood the vessel cuts her way:
Pure breathes the air, the dancing sun-beams play,
And smooth as polish'd glass the mirror of the tide.

XIII.

Proud sailing like a swan, in easy state,
Smooth through the dimpled sea the vessel glides,
The crew, unconscious that a fairy guides,
Aloud with jocund spirit shout elate—
"Some god directs us to the promis'd shore!"
And as they ceaseless gaze the ocean o'er,
Sir Huon and fair Rezia, hand in hand,
Fix'd on the deck in silent rapture stand,
And love seems mute mid views that vary evermore.

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XIV.

And as illimitable scenes expand,
And their enchanted eyes the waves pursue
Where the blue ocean melts in air from view,
Huon begins to praise his native land:
" How sweet her lovely scènes! her sons how gay!
" From east to west th' all-seeing eye of day
" That lights the vast creation, smiles on none
" No spot so charming as his dear Garonne."—
All this his liegeman swears, and echoes back the lay.

XV.

How leaps his heart, whene'er the old man hears
The praises of his native Gascony!
Tun'd to that strain, each sound is melody!
And Rezia listens with delighted ears,
Though oft to her the words no sense convey.
Yet while he speaks, his looks his soul betray;
To these the maiden motionless attends,
Not one escapes her, all she comprehends:
Tho' new, yet not unknown what Huon's glances say.

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OBERON, CANTO VI.

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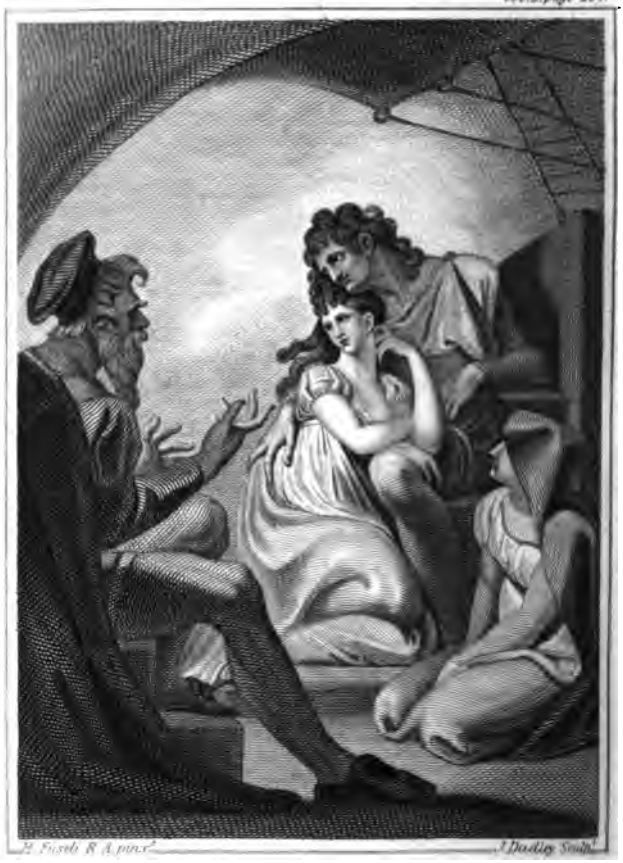

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Published March 1st 1800, by Cadell & Davies, Strand.

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XVI.

The glowing hand whose gentle pressure fires,
A sigh that lightens the o'erladen heart,
A kiss soft stol'n from cheeks where blushes start,
And, oh! a look that love himself inspires,
Bathing in blissful dew the languid eye—
Can winning eloquence such pow'rs supply?
What can like these confute, convince, control,
What dart so penetrate from soul to soul?
So deep, yet softly, wound—so swift, yet certain, fly?

XVII.

Oft in this speechless language, glance on glance,
When mute the tongue, how voluble the heart!
And oft retiring from the rest apart,
Silent they sit in fascinating trance:
Or standing, arm in arm, as soul in soul,
View far around the world of waters roll:
Yet not without a witness—Fatma came,
At once the friend, and soother of their flame:
E'en Huon begg'd her stay, and own'd her kind
control.

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XVIII.

Deep thunders ever the terrifick tone—
" Taste not the fruit forbidden ere the time,
" Or Oberon, in vengeance of the crime,
" Leaves you on life's wide desert, lost, alone!"—
What meant the spirit by that boding cry?
Yet a deep meaning menac'd in his eye,
Which, as he spoke, grew more and more severe;
And as its lustre sunk beneath a tear,
I saw his heavenly charms in gradual darkness die.

XIX.

These bodings chill wild passion's raging fire—
Shall he again with sportive freedom dare
Breathe on her cheek, and braid her ebon hair
Regardless of the god's predicted ire?—
But, ah! the hidden flame more fiercely glows:
Love wantons in the air that round him flows,
Warm'd by her balmy breath—by love portray'd,
Still floats before his view th' enchanting maid—
How shall each tortur'd sense be sooth'd to still repose!

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XX.

And, oh! herself beneath the morning light,
Herself beneath the evening's roseate gleam,
Herself beneath the moon's pale silvery beam,
For ever shines before his ravish'd sight!
In every graceful attitude display'd,
How charms the nymph-like figure of the maid!
And when from sight the lovers lone retire,
And Rezia stands unveil'd, his glance of fire
Glides o'er her snowy neck, and charms by stealth survey'd!

XXI.

Th' alluring danger more and more assails—
"Rezia!" he cries, "if aught on earth have power
"To guard frail nature till the destin'd hour,
"Oh, hide thy charms beneath impervious veils!
"Give not a grace to view:—in many a fold
"Hide from my ravish'd sight this beauteous mould,
"The living ivory of thy polish'd arm!
"And, oh! to shield me from each tempting charm,
"Kind spirit! change my heart, and turn to marble cold!"

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XXII.

Tho' weary'd virtue oft his soul forsake,
Heroick ardour burning in his breast
Resolv'd, unvanquish'd, to sustain the test.
For great and fair it seem'd, to undertake
Stern virtue's fiery conflict, great and fair
The wish to conquer, and the heart to dare—
How glorious, then, to gain th' unrivall'd prize!
But, ah! when more oppos'd, more strongly rise
The foe's resistless pow'rs, hope sinks in deep despair.

XXIII.

Yet what, triumphant beauty! spreads thy sway,
Like wistful looks, that indolently rove,
Tranc'd in sweet visions of insatiate love?
Each treacherous glance dissolves the soul away.
Struck by this thought, the youth delays no more
The pious custom of the knights of yore,
To turn to Christian faith the Pagan race.
For Rezia yet untouch'd by heavenly grace,
Bow'd to her native rites, fierce Mahom's heathen lore.

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XXIV.

To wean his angel from this baneful pest
Impatient Huon prest the willing fair
His little lot of Christian grace to share.
Each word stream'd full conviction in her breast;
No martyr could in zeal our youth exceed:
Tho' strong in faith, in knowledge weak indeed:
Nor was theology his forte, I own—
Without a gloss or comment, simply shown,
He taught her all he knew—his pater, and his creed.

XXV.

If aught in ground-work, or instruction fail'd,
The preacher fill'd her heart with fiery glow:
And, like brave knight to wordy strife a foe,
By force, not eloquence, her faith assail'd.
Test of the truth, the oath he roundly swears
By life and limb to prove what Heaven declares—
From Turk, Jew, Infidel, his ready zeal
Cuts off each scruple by impartial steel,
And all the heathen world on earth and ocean dares.

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XXVI.

Truth from the rosy lip of one belov'd
Wins with resistless sway, her willing heart.
Whate'er he utters, needs no grace of art.
She listens, hears, concludes all plainly prov'd—
What can, like love, so feelingly persuade?
A look and kiss at once convince the maid:
Her brain no curious web of mystery weaves;
Does Huon credit it?—his bride believes,
And quickly signs the cross on brow and breast display'd.

XXVII.

And what now fails the Christian to complete?
One rite alone—(so thinks th' impatient youth,
Who thus had wrought this miracle of truth)
With longing zeal her Huon's wish to meet,
The ready convert by like ardour sway'd,
Thinks every moment lost, the rite delay'd.
A reverend priest, St. Basil's pious son,
Perfects the work by Huon's zeal begun,
And heavenly grace implores, and names th' adopted maid.

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XXVIII.

Now by the name of sweet Amanda known,
Fair Rezia, since her lip by heavenly grace
Renounc'd the errours of the heathen race,
Gains by this step not Paradise alone,
But in her Huon's eye more lovely shines.
Yet, ah! his virtue visibly declines!
Where will the witchery of rapture end
When hands and meeting hearts each moment blend?
In vain old Mentor winks, and warns with ceaseless signs.

XXIX.

In vain before them Fatma hourly frets:
Wild with the fever that inflames the soul,
Th' o'erheated Paladin, beyond control,
The dwarf, the warning, and his doom forgets—
Worn Sherasmin in winks may die away—
The boundless ecstacies that day by day
Thrill o'er Amanda's charms, whose angel kiss
Heaven may permit him, nor reprove the bliss,
Wild with inebriate love, each reeling sense betray.

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XXX.

And Rezia, since the time her former name
Was barter'd for Amanda in exchange,
In wider limits seems at large to range.
All that high birth, and proud distinction claim
Unnotic'd die—court, country, royal state,
All trace and memory of her former fate,
That on her drooping soul oppressive hung,
Were, with a word, in cold oblivion flung—
At lov'd Amanda's name off fell at once the weight.

XXXI.

For Huon born with new-created charms,
All former joys she gave for him alone,
Resign'd for him her country and a throne,
And feels how great her gain in Huon's arms.
Rezia is dead—Amanda lives to prove
Source, centre, circle of existence, love!
She gave herself—has nothing more to give—
Has in the world but Huon to receive:
Self-dead, for him alone to be, to breathe, to move.

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XXXII.

The squire, in mirror of remember'd days
Perceives too plain, what both no more perceive;
Sees, like a moth that doth herself deceive,
Virtue unvers'd, unwarn'd, approach the blaze—
How mild the lustre of that lovely ray!
How soft the warmth that flatters to betray!
Alas! 'tis innocence, that self-abus'd
Still floats in lessening circles more confus'd,
And burns her quivering wings, and gradual dies away!

XXXIII.

The old man, in this season of distress
(With Fatma secretly in union join'd),
Tries every mode that comes across his mind
To curb impetuous passion's dread excess!
How shall he fetter love in reason's chain?
Now this, now that, distracts his searching brain,
To occupy, to rouse them, to amuse—
At last he tells, long tedious hours to lose,
A little tale he tells, their ardour to restrain.*

* Sherasmin's tale is sufficiently known to the English reader

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by the January and May of Pope: yet, though I have omitted nearly the whole of it, the part inserted will clearly point out the art and contrivance with which Wieland has interwoven into the texture, and rendered essential to the completion of the main object of his poem, the only incident in the story which could have induced him to revive the subject.—The incident to which I allude is the presence of Oberon and Titania in the garden scene: and with this I begin the narrative.

LXXXV.

Now, near the scene, by chance that very day
Reclin'd upon a bank of blooming flowers,
To pass in cool repose the sultry hours,
King Oberon and fair Titania lay,
His elfine queen: while, zephyr-like, the train
Of sportive fays that trip beneath their reign,
Now here, now there, along the garden strown,
Or hid in pillowy moss with flow'rs o'ergrown,
Slept till the moon-light beam impearl'd the dewy plain.

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LXXXVI.

Invisibly they sat, and caught each word,
All that had past the man and wife between,
And view'd with scornful eye the pear-tree scene!
Fierce indignation fir'd the elfine lord—
" There!" said he to Titania, " there behold,
" How true the saying of the wise of old!—
" Who that bold guilt, that horrid crime can name,
" Which raging woman to attain her aim,
" Dares not, with frontless face, and fury uncontroll'd?

LXXXVII.

" Friend Solomon! thou rightly tun'st the strain:
" One single honest man may yet be found!
" But he who wanders all the world around
" To find one honest wife will search in vain!
" Seest thou, Titania, mid yon pear-tree leaves,
" The faithless woman that her mate deceives,
" And mocks the miseries of the helpless wight;
" And thinks herself secure from mortal sight,
" As mid the deepest gloom that Pluto's grotto weaves.

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LXXXVIII.

" No—by my lily wand, my sov'reign throne,
" And by that awful pow'r whose high command
" What time he plac'd this sceptre in my hand,
" Bad all the fairy world my empire own,
" Nor art nor blindness, shall that woman aid!
" Such treason in my presence, so display'd,
" Shall not unpunish'd pass!—Again the light
" Shall pierce the film that dims Gangolfo's sight,
" And glare upon their guilt in open act survey'd!"—

LXXXIX.

' Wilt thou?' Titania says, with angry mien,
And cheeks that flush'd with rash impatience' glow;
' So shall my oath match thine!—and, mark my vow!—
' I swear as true as I am fairy queen,
' As true as I am partner of thy throne,
' The woman shall find out some way unknown,
' To gloss her guilt, and screen herself from shame:
' Is then Gangolfo wholly free from blame?
' Is liberty your lot, and patience ours alone?' *

* Here, by the intervention of Titania, the woman's artifice prevails, and the indignation of Oberon at once breaks forth. The stanzas in which the latter is exprest, I have inserted; they lead to the developement of the main subject of the poem.

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XCVIII.

"Titania! now thou hear'st"—with scornful air
elfin monarch says, "a little tear
"Blots out what eyes beheld—thou triumph'st here—
"Yet mark the oath! the holiest oath I swear—
"I lov'd thee, and I thought myself belov'd!
"And all my life a sweet enchantment prov'd—
"'Twas but a dream!—'tis thou dissolv'st the charm—
"Think not a tear shall Oberon disarm!—
"Hence! fly to haunts unblest, from love and me
removv'd!

XCIX.

"On earth, in air, and sea, we meet no more!
"Nor in the groves whose branches balsam weep;
"Nor where in secret caverns dark and deep,
"The griffin broods enchanted treasures o'er!
"Thy breath pollutes the air that round thee blows!
"Hence! in each tainted gale infection flows!—
"Fly! wo to thee! and the deceitful brood,
"Thy sex! and wo the slave by love subdu'd!
"I loathe ye all alike!—all bane of my repose!

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C.

" And when a man within the wedded snare,
" Urg'd by resistless impulse lowly woos,
" Pleas'd to be caught, and while he pants and coos,
" Sweet poison sucks from looks so seeming fair,
" Thinks it is love when fires unhallow'd wake
" Th' envenom'd passions of the bosom-snake—
" And when the siren speaks, enchanted hears,
" Trusts her loud oath, believes her traitour tears,
" May penury, wo, and pain, the willing fool o'ertake!

CI.

" And now by heav'n's tremendous pow'r I swear!
" By him whom spirits silently adore!
" No pow'r shall shake the solemn oath I swore,
" Till, mark'd by fate itself, a youthful pair,
" Warm'd by pure love, and faith's undying flame,
" In weal or wo eternally the same,
" Joys that seduce, and pains that tame the heart,
" Their souls still join'd, tho' doom'd by fate to part,
" By innocence absolve this deed of wanton shame!

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CII.

" And when this union of congenial souls
" Shall meet in love, and fate's severest stroke
" Sustain, while patience smiles beneath the yoke;
" And o'er their brow when raging ocean rolls,
" Still hold their plighted faith, and chaste desires;
" And when they truth prefer mid tort'ring fires
" To siren pleasure on a proffer'd throne—
" Be this accomplish'd, then, and then alone,
" Again we meet in bliss—but now, e'en hope expires!"

CIII.

So spake the king, and vanish'd from her sight—
In vain with soothing voice, and angel charms
Following his flight she lur'd him to her arms;
No earnest pray'r recalls the indignant spright—
Should he too haply sigh with alter'd mind,
Who shall his heaven-attested oath unbind?
In vain with tears of wo repentance pleads,
Till faith, which sure all human faith exceeds,
Points out the wish'd-for pair, by heav'n in union join'd!

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CIV.

And from that fatal moment, till this time
The fairy king has never deign'd to show
His native form, but wandering to and fro,
Now dwells upon the mountain peak sublime,
Now hid beneath a forest's gloomy shade,
Or in abandon'd desert lonely laid;
His ceaseless pleasure, and his sole employ
To torture lovers, and their bliss destroy—
How wondrous that the god has deign'd your union aid!

CV.

Here the old man his long narration ends.
Sir Huon takes Amanda by the hand—
'If two fond hearts made one by heaven's command,
'Bless with reunion sweet the fairy friends,
'Soon shall the elfine queen her sov'reign greet;
'Our faith the hard condition shall complete:
'Did not the god himself unite our minds?
'The god, once foe of love, our union binds!—
'Ye ling'ring trials, haste! I long the test to meet!'

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CVI.

She hears: consenting smiles alone reply:
Amanda lays his hand upon her heart,
With looks that souls in bliss alone impart.
Ah! what was left that language could supply,
To her whose life and soul on Huon rest?
And now such transports shot from breast to breast,
That Sherasmin is fearful all will fail,
The promis'd fruit of his instructive tale,
Tho' ceaseless winks and nods his wary mind exprest.

CVII.

Fair was the veil that hid th' increasing ill:
'Twas innocence that wove it, self-abus'd:
And love, that still more free its flow diffus'd,
As purer gush'd the spring that fed the rill.
Never more new to love met youthful pair:
Yet, thence, dependant on a single hair,
Hung their whole lot—one moment might destroy!
Brush from their path the filmy thread of joy!
One moment—they are lost! and, ah! how ill aware!

END OF VOL. I.

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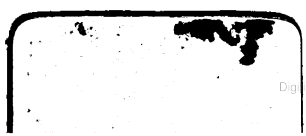
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